

THE SHALOM-ORIENTED LIFE THROUGH LECTIO DIVINA

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To Rachel, my companion for life. The most beautiful person I know.

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## ABSTRACT

Our modern American culture is experiencing a fear-epidemic. Anxiety and other fear-related illnesses are at an all-time high with an increasing number of individuals receiving medication to cope with the symptoms. But what if there was another way to live? The Bible tells us there is: the shalom-oriented life. When God created the world, he created everything with shalom. But the shalom-oriented life was lost and instead humanity embraced a fear-oriented life. This thesis-project examines how a Christian can move from a more fear-oriented life to a more shalom-oriented life through a continual and consistent practice of *lectio divina*.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### Shalom-Oriented Living

It is very clear to see from the books coming out today that those living in western individualist cultures are looking for wholeness.<sup>1</sup> People are longing for a world where everything can be set right. We are looking for an inner world where all is calm and where the emotional luggage we have carried can be set down for a better way of life. What would it look like for us to embrace the shalom of God? What would it look like for us to receive the life he has always intended for us? How would our lives look different?

When God created the world, he created it with his shalom and his longing was that all creation would live connected to the Trinity as its essential life source. God hovered<sup>2</sup> over creation in love to bring forth his good work out of the chaos. This shalom, which carries with it so much more than our usual definition of peace, has the underlying connotation of wholeness and the way life was always meant to be. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. puts it this way:

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets called *shalom*. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight*. . . . Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be. . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2004), 4-5. See also Chuck DeGroat, *Wholehearted* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016) and Brene Brown, *The Gift of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Compare Genesis 1:2 with Deuteronomy 32:11 where **נִרְחַף** carried with it the idea of the vulnerable love of a parent hovering over his children to provide support and protection.

. . . In a shalomic state each entity [all communities, families, married couples, groups of friends, and individual human beings] would have its own integrity or structured wholeness, and each would also possess many edifying relations to other entities.<sup>3</sup>

When God<sup>4</sup> began his work his intention was that humanity would live in wholeness with God, others, creation, and self. God's invitation from the very beginning was that all creation would experience the flourishing and wholeness that has always existed within the Godhead. In this sense, creation became an overflow of the divine love. Our opportunity and invitation was to experience and participate in the divine dance of God.<sup>5</sup> This is the life we were made for! This is the life God has always longed to give us but instead of choosing that life we chose a life divorced from God and his communion. As Alexander Schmemmann so eloquently puts it,

The "original" sin is not primarily that man has "disobeyed" God; the sin is that he ceased to be hungry for Him and for Him alone, ceased to see his whole life...as a sacrament of communion with God. The sin was not that man neglected his religious duties. The sin was that he thought of God in terms of religion; i.e. opposing Him to life.<sup>6</sup>

With this commitment to autonomy came a dis-ease that has plagued us since the very beginning.

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<sup>3</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 10.

<sup>4</sup> See Genesis 1:26. The Trinity was involved with this creational act: "Then God said, 'Let *us* make mankind in our image...' [Italics added].

<sup>5</sup> Perichoresis is the word the early church fathers used to describe God's relationship with himself. God is not a distant king but a dance of eternal love. See Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 18.

## The Problem: Deep Internal Restlessness

The ancients have spoken very well to a dis-ease with which we are all familiar. We have all experienced a life where there is a lack of shalom. We have all put our energy and resources into some false self-identity marker that has left us unfulfilled. This misplacement of self has caused us a deep internal restlessness. There is a division between the life we live externally with others and the life we feel internally. It is a feeling that the ideal life we are looking for is out there to be accomplished but seems so far from our present experience. It is easy for us to see this restlessness as evil, but actually this agitation that we all experience is God's way of drawing us to himself and the life of wholeness that was always meant to be ours.

Philosophers speak of a “desire of the part to return to the whole”; mystics speak of “the spark of the divine in us”; the ancient Greeks spoke of something they called *nostos*, homesickness (a feeling of never being at home, even when you are at home). . . . All of these feelings are in all of us. We are deeply and hopelessly subject to dis-ease, incapable in this life of finding rest. . . . The tragedy is that so many persons, full of riches and bursting with life, see this drive as something which is essentially irreligious, as something which sets them against what is spiritual. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our impulses are God's lure in us.<sup>7</sup>

God has continued to give us his invitation to a better way to live where our inner world is no longer divided, where our stressed bodies, minds, and souls could find rest, and where our regrets of the past or our worries about the future could find a contented release to embrace the present for all God has intended it to be. God has invited us to a life where our very being is tethered to him and where our souls can find their true home.

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lillies* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2004), 9.

The problem for us is that we have not accepted God's invitation to wholeness. Instead, we have found ourselves plunging our restlessness into some self-created identity other than our creator. This unfortunately has caused us great harm and has led in our day to what I would call a fear epidemic.

### **Fear-Oriented Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Though many advances have been made in our world and especially in the context of personal development, the steadily increasing epidemic of fear-related mental illnesses is on the rise. In fact, panic anxiety is the number one mental health problem in America. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, more than 23 million Americans suffer from some form of anxiety disorder, including panic anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, phobias, and generalized anxiety disorder.<sup>8</sup> This panic anxiety is connected to several other issues but ultimately it is connected to fear. What we ultimately find is the line between fear and these mental disorders is pretty thin.

Scientists generally define fear as a negative emotional state triggered by the presence of a stimulus (the snake) that has the potential to cause harm, and anxiety as a negative emotional state in which the threat is not present but anticipated. . . . But the truth is, the line between fear and anxiety can get pretty thin and fuzzy. If you saw the abovementioned snake at a particular rock on the path of your walk, and are now at that spot, the rock may stand in for the snake and elicit fear, even though the snake itself is nowhere to be found. In modern life, many fear states are like this – they are brought on by things, signposts or signals that stand for harm rather than things that are truly harmful.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Archibald D. Hart, *The Anxiety Cure* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Ledoux, "Searching the Brain for the Roots of Fear," *New York Times*, January 22, 2012, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/22/anatomy-of-fear/>.

Fear continues to mark our day. We are worried about the regrets of our past that continue to speak into our present world. We find ourselves worrying about the future and the uncertainty that we cannot control. Outside of our own lives, we encounter issues that continue to fester and cause unrest: terrorism, poverty, racial injustice, and political dividedness to name just a few. Nevertheless, underneath all our worries, anxieties, and depression is a controlling fear narrative. Edward Welch summarizes it this way:

There was a time when adults were neatly categorized into one of two groups: you were either neurotic or psychotic. Psychotic meant that you were out of touch with reality and afraid; neurotic meant that you were in touch with reality and afraid. Today we are much more enlightened and offer many more diagnostic possibilities. There are scores of psychiatric disorders from which we can select. Yet by far the largest category remains fear.<sup>10</sup>

There is a reason that scripture speaks to fear so much. The reality is that for many of us, especially Christians, fear has been and will continue to be a primary motivator and driver. Though our minds speak the sovereignty of God over our lives and our intellectual doctrines proclaim his lordship, the reality is that, at the subconscious level and in our hearts, fear continues to reign as king over our decisions. Fear has a neurological effect on our brains and we return to the self-defeating habits that have been engrained<sup>11</sup> over the years.

### Personal Story

I can see how this fear has controlled my life through the years. As an achiever wired to accomplish the next thing and living with a constant vision for the future, I

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<sup>10</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Running Scared* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2007), 22.

<sup>11</sup> See James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009) where he would say these habits have become their own version of a liturgy in our lives for worship.

found myself struggling with anxiety for the first time in my life in September 2011. At the time, I was confused about what was happening to me but later I discovered it was anxiety. I had developed poor habits of living unconnected from God. I found myself still accomplishing and achieving the goals I set out to complete but I was still worried and fearful about my future. I find my story relating to that of Brigid Schulte of the *Washington Post*. She writes,

Because this is how it feels to live my life: scattered, fragmented, and exhausting. I am always doing more than one thing at a time and feel I never do any one particularly well. I am always behind and always late, with one more thing and one more thing and one more thing to do before rushing out the door. Entire hours evaporate while I'm doing stuff that needs to get done. But once I'm done, I can't tell you what it was I did or why it seemed so important.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting that despite theological degrees and years in pastoral ministry, I have found myself still being driven by this fear narrative to accomplish and achieve. I had taken a scarcity approach to life rather than a view of abundance. I knew that I needed God to do some soul work in me, work that would allow me to experience the life of wholeness that he has always promised.

Even so, I knew that my dilemma was related to my cultural context. In fact, my story is part of this epidemic of fear that has been working below the surface in me for so many years and is part of the diagnosis for so many people. It led me to ask: What if this fear epidemic that has existed in my own life and has been found in so many Americans' lives also exists in the context of the church I help to pastor?

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<sup>12</sup> Brigid Schulte, *Overwhelmed* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 4.

## Church and Community Context

Ward Church is located in Northville, Michigan. It is a church that has made an incredible impact for many years. The church has existed for over 60 years but can trace its roots to 1842 and the Scottish Presbyterian Church in the heart of Detroit, Michigan. In 1879, it changed its name to Central Presbyterian Church. Central played an important role in starting churches throughout Detroit. One of the daughter churches they started was called Bethel Church and it changed its name on February 28, 1938 to the Elizabeth W. Ward Memorial Presbyterian Church as the result of a \$30,000 bequest. In 1956, under the leadership of Bartlett Hess, Ward Church began a satellite campus in the booming suburbs of Detroit to reach young families who were moving to this bedroom community. From 1956, Ward Church began to grow quickly but experienced exponential growth from 1975-1991 where the membership grew from 2,339 to 5,276.

Bartlett Hess was a pioneer who had a passion for reaching the western suburbs of Detroit with the gospel. The word “megachurch” did not exist in the 1970s but Ward Church would have been one of the earliest megachurches in America. Articles were written in the 1970s and early 1980s about the explosive growth happening in our church. The growth was so expansive, four daughter churches were started during this time to handle the massive influx of people. Ward Church was one of the pioneers of the bus ministry in the 1970s. They were also a strong proponent of missions with a goal to have 100 missionary partners around the world. Under the leadership of Bartlett Hess, Ward Church started the Evangelical Presbyterian Church denomination in 1981. The first General Assembly for the denomination was held at Ward Church in 1981. Today the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has over 600 churches.

One of the primary vehicles for growth was ministry work with divorced singles. Ward Church began a ministry under the leadership of Hess to reach, empower, and connect these divorced individuals to the church. This community who struggled to find a place anywhere began to explode overnight, seeing 1,500 individuals per month. In the 1970s and 1980s, divorced individuals were ostracized from churches and struggled to connect with others. When other churches were shunning divorced individuals, Ward Church opened its doors and welcomed them in with the love of Jesus. Word of this ministry spread throughout the entire region of Metro Detroit and people would drive over an hour to attend this ministry called Single Point. There was a regional attraction to this ministry and Ward grew exponentially because of it.

Another primary vehicle for growth was Christian Education at Ward Church. Ward placed a huge emphasis on Bible study. Competent pastors and lay ministry leaders led large groups that comprised up to 600 people. Ward Church hired the best voices and leaders in Christian Education from around the country. This emphasis on Christian Education can still be experienced at Ward Church. The church grew and brought on the best staff to lead these Bible studies.

Through a rough pastoral transition, losing a founding pastor, and the inevitability of vision drift, Ward began to decline in attendance from 1993 to 2016. But last year, Ward Church began to experience growth once again. Our church grew in reaching younger families and singles in our community and our average attendance is around 2,300 on a Sunday. Learning to lead in a multi-generational church is absolutely beautiful but also comes with its challenges. While pioneering in our ability to reach younger families, learning to pastor well our older generation is extremely important. Many who

joined the church during the 1970s and 1980s still remember fondly those years of ministry and many long for a return to the “old ways”—the bus ministry, Single Point, the old Christian Education classes. Some believe these ways of ministry have been lost and need to be recovered. However, what God used to reach our community previously is not necessarily what he will use again. It could be argued that each time in a culture is unique.

In reaching our older members, an ancient scripture practice has the potential to connect with our church given its evangelical history and commitments. Our nostalgia is strong and so are the ways we engage with God through scripture. Ward Church has always been committed to scripture and to the high priority of the Bible. Our church has historically maintained a high commitment to meditating on scripture. In reaching younger families and singles, their priorities are different. These younger families and singles usually want an experiential faith, not just a Bible study. They desire an encounter with God through his word. But is there even a need for spiritual formation in such a theologically-rich and historical church?

It would be easy to assume that the church I pastor is one of the last places you would find a fear-oriented life. Northville is an affluent community where many people hope to move and settle into their ‘forever home.’ Northville has a median household income of \$95,478, compared to \$49,576 in the rest of Michigan. The median income in the United States is \$53,889.<sup>13</sup> Northville is a well-educated city; and its residents are not usually limited in their career choices or other pursuits. Our community is made of CEOs,

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<sup>13</sup> These numbers are taken from the 2016 demographics found at [census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

VPs, engineers, and marketers. It would be natural to assume that they already enjoy a shalom perspective. However, the data shows that in such communities the incidence of fear-related illnesses is high. Hart writes,

[What is] perhaps the most alarming aspect of panic attacks is that they mostly strike the strong. Yes, you read that correctly. Panic anxiety strikes those who seem to be the strongest among us. The common stereotype is that only “weak” or anxiety-riddled people succumb to anxiety, particularly panic anxiety. This is just not true. . . . Anxiety is not a disorder that afflicts the weak, the fragile, and the delicate. Often there is not the slightest hint of previous anxiety. This is the disorder of presidents, CEOs, VPs, ladder-climbers, powerhouses, dynamos, live wires, and go-getters. Those in leadership positions are more likely to be candidates for panic anxiety. Reason? Anxiety is a disease of stress. High-pressure jobs take their toll more than low-key jobs. People who are caught up in the pursuit of excellence are particularly vulnerable because they can’t see the danger signs early enough.<sup>14</sup>

The community I pastor in is actually, from all the data points, the most susceptible to a fear-oriented life. Through casual conversations with congregants, they have expressed to me how fear is a primary motivator and driver in their lives. They are concerned with how fear and worry consume their lives. They want to take the necessary steps towards wholeness with God. They long for another way to live where God’s shalom allows them to have contentment and joy.

### **Exploring the Context and Issues**

In exploring this community and ways to move from a fear-oriented life to a shalom-oriented life, there will be some problems that need to be addressed. With every community, there are upsides and downsides for constructing a project that can be tested.

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<sup>14</sup> Hart, *The Anxiety Cure*, 2-3.

## Problems for Testing

One issue that is crucial for this project to work is the anonymity of the individuals. Northville is a ladder-climbing community in every positive sense of the word. People are ambitious, driven and want to make a difference in the world. With this type of success, it becomes difficult to admit shortcomings. In these settings, there is a jockeying for social status and acceptance. It becomes important for these individuals to at least have the persona of constant success. Life becomes a competitive comparison of ‘where do I stack up’. This way of life is not completely negative. The negative only comes with our inability to be vulnerable about the fear that defines our lives and admitting our need for help. If help is happening, it is happening in therapy sessions with a local psychologist. This is great! But this kind of help is no substitute for the life of shalom and wholeness promised to us. One hour a week exploring the distance between our ideal self and our actual self will not get us to the life of the kingdom available right now in the present. There needs to be more and I believe there is much spiritual growth to be had in this project.

Nevertheless, for this project to work and for people in this community to do the hard soul work of unearthing their fears and working toward wholeness found in God, they will need to know that this project is done in anonymity. I will need to construct the project in such a way where their names are left out of the experiment and they will only be known by a number within the experiment. This encryption will allow them to engage fully – whether it is working or not for them – and to leave behind anything that will cause them to disengage with the practice in full.

## Challenges for Testing

Our community, because of its ambitious drive, is constantly moving on to the next enterprise. Because of their ability and desire to perform, they always seek another promotion, degree, or image. This means they are always in a state of taking on too much in their lives and trying to balance everything from the margin. They are a community that leads and works in high-powered corporations usually with some connection to the auto industry.

One of the main challenges for this community is silencing the fear-oriented voice that communicates, “you are falling behind.” They need to allow enough margin in their lives, so they can move from a fear orientation to a shalom orientation. The busyness of this community will be a constant challenge. There are always so many demands within work and family life. Whenever they are with one, they feel guilty about the other. It will be hard for them to make the space they need for spiritual formation but it will be the best thing for them.

Because people in this community juggle work, family, faith and so many other things in their life, a spiritual practice must be able to fit within a small margin to be effective. The project cannot hope to accomplish too much or it will not be completed at all. This is a legitimate concern that needs to be addressed in the project, but it appears that this can be accomplished. The goal of the project is for the participants to take a small step in the right direction. Hopefully, this project will develop the appropriate spiritual and neurological habits that the participants will desire to cultivate a shalom-oriented life.

Reluctant participants, those unwilling to engage in a spiritual practice that is new to them, are another challenge. There are several factors as to why this poses a threat to the validity of the study. First, neurologically we are prone to wanting to control our environment and to have complete understanding of what we are engaging in. This is how we become ‘creatures of habit.’ We find something we like – why would we ever want to try something different? Engaging in a new practice regardless of how well it is explained (and it needs to be explained thoroughly) is incredibly difficult for people because it means they have to step out into the unknown. Secondly, because of the evangelical tradition of our community, it could be a challenge for people to want to engage in a practice that is different from what they have known for years. This community is aware of Bible studies and the importance of growing in biblical wisdom and knowledge. There is a high level of objectivity and certainty that comes with this form of spiritual practice. The challenge for some could be the engagement in a new experience that opens participants up to a more subjective discipline. It will be imperative for this community that a spiritual practice has scripture as the foundation because of the deep commitment within the evangelical tradition to biblical engagement. But while these are challenges that could create a stumbling block to the project, there are ways to approach this project that will allow this community to leave behind those concerns.

Yet another challenge facing the project is the level of affluence within the community. It is not that the level of affluence is bad in and of itself but that their affluence allows them to move from one endeavor to the next as they seek to fill the deep restlessness of their soul. What every human must experience for great spiritual awakening is the rock bottom of powerlessness that propels the soul heavenward toward

God.<sup>15</sup> Spiritual formation is hard, slow work. But as the farmer cultivates the soil, plants, waters, and waits, so we must approach spiritual formation in the same fashion. Though there are challenges with conducting this type of project, from what is known about this community there are great upsides, including actually addressing a tremendous spiritual need.

### Opportunities for Testing

In our community, there is not an authentic Tex-Mex restaurant. But if an authentic Tex-Mex restaurant were started in our community, there would be a tremendous opportunity for business. In much the same way, a spiritual project that incorporates a commitment to silence has some enormous potential in our fast and always-moving community because it is such a contrast from the way most of us currently live. Moving people from a life of busyness to silence has the potential to create an oasis in the desert. Creating space to engage with the subconscious “emotional programs of happiness”<sup>16</sup> will be a fruitful endeavor. This practice must start with the beginner in mind. All spiritual writers encourage beginning with a practice that has a short time commitment. But even with a short commitment, the opportunity for spiritual growth is high.

Another opportunity for this project is using an ancient spiritual practice that is rather unconnected from the evangelical tradition. Within the evangelical church, there

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<sup>15</sup> See Richard Rohr, *Breathing Under Water* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2011), 3.

<sup>16</sup> See Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012).

has been a commitment to solid biblical knowledge in an educational format. This is not evil but simply limiting to the larger expression of spiritual formation that the Church has implemented through the centuries. Our church community is aware of Bible studies and other models that get at understanding a biblical passage's historical and grammatical meaning. This form of spiritual formation exists to acquire a new perspective on a passage. The opportunity for our community to engage in a well-tested and ancient practice of the Church like this one has an enormous upside. Though there are challenges with incorporating a new spiritual practice for many people, the potential opportunity far outweighs any negative.

### **A Way Through to Shalom: Lectio Divina**

The spiritual practice that will be used for this project is lectio divina. Lectio divina is Latin for “divine reading.” It is an ancient way of engaging with scripture and listening for God in the biblical text for what he wants us to hear. It is a means of engaging with God, but the structure<sup>17</sup> is not so wooden and restrictive that the practice destroys creativity.

The history of lectio divina is rooted primarily in the ancient Hebraic tradition of the “Shema.” Cynthia Zirlott comments, “The Shema consists of repeated readings of Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; and Numbers 15:37-41, with exactness and built-in pauses between certain words. The last word of each verse is read with greater emphasis and

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<sup>17</sup> The structure will be presented later in the Lectio Divina Practice section.

mental concentration that facilitates a communal meditation.”<sup>18</sup> Lectio divina is focused on the command to “hear” which stands in contrast to scriptural disciplines of study, exegesis, hermeneutics, and theological reflection.

The Jewish community sought “to cultivate the ability to listen deeply to the God who speaks through the Word and then to allow the Word to shape an appropriate response in thought, prayer, and the conduct of daily life.”<sup>19</sup> The reality is the primary organ for receiving God’s revelation is not the eye that sees but the ear that hears.<sup>20</sup> The spirit of lectio divina is captured in Psalm 40:6. The Psalmist declares, “אָזְנוֹתַי כָּרַיתָ לִּי” (Literally: ears you dug for me). Eugene Peterson responds to this image, “But the psalms poet was bold to imagine God swinging a pickax, digging ears in our granite blockheads so that we can hear, really hear, what [God] speaks to us.”<sup>21</sup> It was not physical ears God supplied, but the psalmist is highlighting the spiritual ears God has given us to hear his voice. “The Hebraic tradition [understood that] the holy and absolute transcendent God is present among the people in the Word.”<sup>22</sup> God is present but the Jewish community knew that a practice was needed to cultivate the ability to hear his voice.

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<sup>18</sup> Cynthia I. Zirlott, *The Upper Room Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation*, ed. Keith Beasley-Topliffe (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2003), s. v. “Lectio Divina.”

<sup>19</sup> Zirlott, “Lectio Divina.”

<sup>20</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 92.

<sup>21</sup> Peterson, *Eat this Book*, 92.

<sup>22</sup> Zirlott, “Lectio Divina.”

Lectio divina began in the Jewish context as a prayer movement involving four to seven people who read at least three verses from the Hebrew Torah or Prophets. The text stimulated a “murmuring” which took the form of singing or chanting the verse.<sup>23</sup> The lectio divina practice was passed down through the monastic period with a similar style from its Hebraic roots. However, the desert fathers and mothers began to develop an individual practice of lectio divina that envisioned praying the scriptures with identifiable movements ending with contemplative prayer. Peace comments,

It worked for [the monks] like this: During the time set aside for personal reading, prayer, and reflection, a monk would go to a private place and begin to repeat aloud a passage from Scripture.... The monk spoke the passage out loud until he was struck by a particular word or phrase. Then he would stop and ponder this word or phrase, understanding it to be a word from God for him. This meditation led naturally into prayer as the monk offered back to God what he heard. As he moved deeper and deeper into prayer he would come to the place where he rested in the presence of God. Such a state of contemplation was actively sought.<sup>24</sup>

St. Benedict and his Rule is one of the clearest places to see this focus on individual lectio divina.<sup>25</sup> The printing press did not exist yet so it was an expensive and time-consuming process to reproduce books. Only the ones of special value were copied. This meant books would need to be absorbed and committed to memory by multiple readings. St. Benedict used this common practice of memorization to form his Rule and the approach to lectio divina. Casey writes, “Benedict envisaged his monks making about

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<sup>23</sup> Zirlott, “Lectio Divina.”

<sup>24</sup> Richard Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God Through Scripture* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 1998), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1996), 4. See also Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 8-9.

three hours a day available for personal lectio.”<sup>26</sup> The practice flowed out of the monasteries which were the centers of learning, and influenced lay persons with this way of approaching God through the scripture.<sup>27</sup> Benedict has been credited for structuring the monk’s life around a daily rhythm of worship, lectio divina, and communal work.

Despite the work of Benedict, the monastic community, and their cultural influence, it was not until Guigo II, a French Carthusian monk, in the twelfth century did the lectio divina process develop into four distinct stages or steps.<sup>28</sup> More recent practitioners and scholars have argued for adding silencio and incarnatio to the lectio divina process. Zirlott comments on incarnatio that, “It is not a new step but a recovery of an emphasis found in the Hebraic, patristic, and early monastic roots.... In the Shema, to listen means to obey. To hear and know God-truth is to love that Truth. Out of love, truth gives form and shape to life and the world.”<sup>29</sup> The emphasis for connecting lectio divina to its Hebraic roots is a great argument for the six-step process which will be argued for later.

Thelma Hall writes, “Lectio has sometimes been called a ‘methodless method’ of prayer. The description alludes to the fact that it is less a learned way of prayer than one which spontaneously ‘flows’ toward contemplation as its destination.”<sup>30</sup> It is amazing that

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<sup>26</sup> Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God Through Scripture*, 12; Zirlott, “Lectio Divina,” 173. While many practitioners argue for a four-step process, a six-step process more accurately captures the goal from the Hebraic tradition.

<sup>29</sup> Zirlott, “Lectio Divina.”

<sup>30</sup> Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 9.

this spiritual discipline with all its merit has fallen out of practice, particularly within the evangelical tradition.

Today, however, Lectio is still practiced as a unique characteristic of monastic prayer, particularly by monks of the Benedictine-Cistercian (Trappist) tradition, that Christian community as a whole seems to have lost awareness of its existence, and of its value as a formative instrument for the growth of Christ's life within us. This has been a considerable loss, particularly because of its direct relationship to the development of contemplative prayer, which is its ultimate fruition.<sup>31</sup>

Hall is arguing that this great practice must be reclaimed! The great goal of this practice is contemplation, which is gazing upon God in the silence. "Contemplation is variously described as a 'resting' in God, or a 'loving gaze' upon him, or a 'knowing beyond knowing,' or a 'rapt attention' to God."<sup>32</sup> With attention to the importance of scripture throughout the spiritual practice, the contemplative experience is not something to be worried about. This is one reason why the lectio divina practice was chosen for this community as opposed to another practice that simply involved silence and contemplation. Within the evangelical community, silence and contemplation without words is confused with being Buddhist. Though this allegation is untrue, it is important to be aware of the community and meeting them on their 'turf' so to speak for any real contribution to take place. But within the practice of lectio divina, contemplation and "rapture"<sup>33</sup> in the presence of God are the end results.

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<sup>31</sup> Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Steps of Humility and Pride* (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 1973), 11.

## The Lectio Divina Practice

The practice of lectio divina has been broken down many different ways. Some have understood it as a four movement path.<sup>34</sup> Others have interpreted lectio as a five-step process.<sup>35</sup> The practice is best represented in a six-step movement: silencio, lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio, and incarnatio. This six-step movement best represents the overall goal of the lectio divina process. Moreover, the six-step movement with an emphasis on incorporating silence is essential when working with an evangelical community like Ward Church. The practice of silence is not a regular discipline in our church. Therefore, this is a great opportunity to introduce the participants to this wonderful spiritual discipline.

We have already discussed that these lectio divina steps are not wooden in order but they do give a structure that is especially helpful for beginners. Ruth Haley Barton writes, “When we are starting out, we concentrate on following the steps and getting everything in the right order. But eventually as we become more comfortable, they become moves in a dance that flows with beauty and pleasure, heart and soul.”<sup>36</sup> As one develops and grows into the practice, they will find that they can move around in the lectio divina steps with more sensitivity to the Spirit’s direction.

The first step of the practice is silencio. To prepare to hear from God through his word, a time of silence is appropriate to quiet our souls in God’s presence. This silence

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<sup>34</sup> Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 57.

<sup>35</sup> Tim Gray, *Praying Scripture for a Change* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009), 109.

<sup>36</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 56.

and preparation “gives us the opportunity to allow the busyness and chaos of our life to settle down until there is a quiet inner space in which we can hear from God.”<sup>37</sup>

The next step of the practice is called *lectio*. It is simply the reading of the passage. It is not a Bible-reading plan where lots of scripture is covered at one time. To do that would be to eliminate the focus and meaning of the practice. It is usually a very small section of scripture that is used during the practice. The goal of *lectio* is not to accomplish or conquer; it is to slow down and receive.<sup>38</sup> It is the step in the practice where we first read and then re-read the scripture, creating space to hear from God in the silence. Repetition is a huge part of the reading process, so we allow the scripture passage<sup>39</sup> to wash over us. The goal is to instill in the practitioner receptivity towards the scripture and to listen for God to speak a word or phrase from the passage that applies to our life. This incorporates the work of the next phase of *lectio divina*: *meditatio*.

The third step of this practice is called *meditatio*. This is the phase where we would begin metaphorically to “squeeze the grapes to extract their juice.”<sup>40</sup> If in *lectio* we asked the questions of who, what, where; in *meditatio* we begin to ask the question why. We recognize that God’s word has power, and it can speak into our lives. Once we arrive at a word or phrase that grabs our attention, the goal of *meditatio* is to sit in that place and allow God to speak. We begin in this phase to move from the word written to another

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<sup>37</sup> Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 56.

<sup>38</sup> Gray, *Praying Scripture for a Change*, 43.

<sup>39</sup> *Lectio divina* can also be done with other items beyond scripture. Examples could be a short paragraph from a book or a piece of art. For the purpose of this paper, I will only be using scripture, given the context of the community.

<sup>40</sup> Gray, *Praying Scripture for a Change*, 57.

community, culture, and context, to now receiving this word as it applies to our own lives. The next phase of lectio divina is where we bring that word or phrase to God in prayer.

This next phase of lectio divina is called oratio. This is the phase where we “can’t help noticing that many of the [scriptural] matters bear directly on our own life. It is here that oratio begins.”<sup>41</sup> We notice a connection between something written in scripture that essentially leaps off the page, and we now turn and bring all of these thoughts to God in prayer. A quick example of this process may be helpful. Matthew 11:28 reads, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” As you read and re-read this passage, you might find the word ‘burdened’ continues to grab your attention. When you take that word and return it to God in prayer, that is oratio. You would ask, “Why is God bringing up that word in my life? Why is this word connecting to my soul?” Oratio is looking back to God in prayer and opening ourselves in surrender to his will and listening. This hopefully leads to the fourth step called contemplatio.

In the fifth step of contemplatio, we simply rest in the presence of God beyond words in the language of silence. This is the ultimate goal of lectio divina – union with God. This is the time where we let go of control in the gaze of God and enjoy the moment of his abiding presence with us. While the previous steps have some level of effort on our part, contemplatio is simply a divine gift that cannot be manufactured. The only effort we bring is surrender to the moment. As we bring our gaze to God, God brings his gaze to us, and he encourages us with his love. We live with an invitation from God to the

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<sup>41</sup> Gray, *Praying Scripture for a Change*, 77.

kingdom life he has for us. We receive his loving gaze as a balm and the shalom touch that our souls need. Our fear-oriented lives receive the embrace of love that allows the soul, mind, and body to find wholeness of life in the kingdom of God.

Finally, the sixth step is incarnatio. We “respond faithfully to whatever invitation we have heard from [God].... We continue to listen to it throughout the day as we are led deeper and deeper into its meaning and it begins to live in us.”<sup>42</sup> We do not live apathetically to the experience we just had with God but “emerge from this place of personal encounter with God to life in the company of others, [with] resolve ... to live it out in the context of daily life and activity.”<sup>43</sup> Incarnatio is our response to the love of God and our encounter with the Trinity.

Lectio divina was never meant to be an act driven by us; it is more a fostering of the right ecosystem where God can work. Lectio divina is not so much about our doing but our being. It is about communion with God, which is where we find the shalom-oriented life. Benner says,

Lectio divina is not really a procedure or even a method – at least not a single method. It is more an approach and an expectation. It arises out of a desire to not simply hear the words. At other times and in other ways of engaging with Scriptures we may seek insights, eternal truths and precepts for living. But in lectio divina what we seek is not information or motivation but communion and union. We seek nothing less than God. We attend to the Word as a way of opening ourselves to God and listen for God’s living word to us. Lectio divina treats Scriptures not as a text to be studied or a set of truths to be grasped but as the living Word – always alive and active, always fresh and new. It is, therefore, not so much a way of reading as a way of listening.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 61.

<sup>44</sup> David G. Benner, *Opening to God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 48.

Lectio divina is creating an open hand posture to God and the world. It is the great ‘letting go.’ It is a reminder that we don’t simply embrace this world with our five senses but that God’s presence is with us. Developing a lectio divina plan will help the individuals who take part in this project move toward a shalom-oriented life.

### **Plan for the Project**

Having read books on the importance of habits<sup>45</sup> and the neurological impact of consistent meditation practices,<sup>46</sup> a project that has a developed plan that lasts for a month (30 days) is a sufficient time to see positive effects. The first step in the process will be to examine the participants on a standard Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test.<sup>47</sup> The reason for using such a test is that these types of questions speak to the fear-oriented life, and as we saw earlier there is a very thin and fuzzy line between anxiety and fear. The participants will answer a series of 15 basic questions. When finished, they will be given a score between 1 and 60. The use of a standardized test that has been previously used and vetted removes as much subjectivity as possible from the project. Secondly, the standardized test allows all participants to be tested on the same set of questions, thus removing any abnormalities that would occur if participants answered different questions. The participants will be encouraged to answer honestly knowing that their names will

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit* (New York, NY: Random House, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> “Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test,” <http://psymed.info/generalized-anxiety-disorder-test>, Psymed, accessed December 18, 2017. See also Appendix A.

never be used in the research publicly. They will only be known by a participant number in the study. This approach to the project will have a higher degree of objectivity in the data received.

The lectio divina workbook<sup>48</sup> will give them one lectio passage to guide them per day. The goal is that this practice will take the participants a total of 15 minutes to complete including engaging with the passage and time for silence. There will be a place for them to take notes on what they are learning and what God is teaching them. If they miss a day, the hope is they will log that as part of gathering the most accurate data possible. After the 30 days, the participants will be retested again with the same Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test. If they are able to complete these lectio exercises, it is my belief that we will see a change in their scores on the generalized anxiety test taken after the project compared to their scores before beginning the lectio project.

### **Expectations for the Project**

The question that I hope to answer is this: will a continual, 30-day practice of lectio divina assist in moving a Christian from a more fear-oriented life to a more shalom-oriented life? It is my position that shalom-oriented living can be accomplished through a sustained practice of lectio divina. I expect to see a small increase in emotional health after the 30-day lectio divina project where participants will move from a more fear-oriented life to experiencing a more shalom-oriented life. There are several reasons why my expectations are warranted.

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<sup>48</sup> See Appendix B for the lectio divina workbook.

First, the growing understanding of neuroscience explains why a fear-oriented life is so prevalent in our culture. The more neuroscientists study the brain, they learn that consistent ways of thinking develop neural pathways in the brain making it progressively easier for people to view the world in a particular way at a conscious and subconscious level.<sup>49</sup> Because daily life is lived with only 5% of conscious awareness, it is important that we understand the neural pathways that have been established for making a positive impact neurologically. It is also important to understand how our brain has evolved through many years and has incorporated new parts and how our primal brain stills controls most of our responses. This primal brain is where our responses to fear and anger are triggered. It is not only the place where it is triggered, but this primal brain synthesizes information 40 times faster than our newer cognitive brain areas like the prefrontal cortex. This means our brain has a greater propensity to have a fear-oriented response rather than a shalom-oriented response to external stimulus in the environment.

Even though there is a greater propensity to a fear-oriented life, neuroscience has discovered some great findings in recent years. Neuroscience used to propose that your brain was fixed. Barring any trauma that dramatically affected one's brain, neuroscientists believed the brain was essentially a fixed organ. However, recent studies over and over support the understanding of what neuroscience calls neuroplasticity, which is our brain's ability to adapt and create new neural pathways for receiving and processing information. Our brains are not static organs: they can be molded and shaped

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<sup>49</sup> Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul* (Carrollton, TX: Tyndale Momentum, 2010), 65-66.

over time, which gives us hope that through the right practices, those who are living a fear-oriented life can develop a more shalom-oriented life.

Second, what neuroscientists have learned about habits has greatly informed the importance of developing good habits in our lives. Such behaviors are formed by developing cues which form routines and ultimately lead to rewards. The goal is to develop such a well-formed habit that, over time, the reward impulse grows so strong that the craving for the reward becomes deeply connected with the cue. This craving will motivate the routine, which produces the reward and thereby develops a habit loop.<sup>50</sup> A lectio divina exercise that lasts for 30 days gives the participants a long enough period over which they can begin to develop a good habit loop.

Third, spiritual teachers and neuroscientists have learned that meditation and contemplation practices greatly affect our neurological and psychological well-being. Studies have revealed that consistent meditation practices have improved neurological balance in the brain where blood flow, which is completely restricted to lower regions of the brain in the fear-oriented state, becomes more predominant to high regions of the brain, like the prefrontal cortex, during meditation.<sup>51</sup> Meditation and contemplative practice has also brought psychological well-being. Thomas Keating has written extensively on contemplative practice and what he calls ‘divine therapy.’<sup>52</sup> This is a

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<sup>50</sup> Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 27-30.

<sup>52</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2004), 91-94.

benefit of contemplative practice and silence where our lives are paused long enough to allow the subconscious to speak and to be noticed at the conscious level.

Lastly, scripture itself teaches the essential role that the Bible plays in cultivating the shalom-oriented life. There are two scripture passages where this is clearly evident: “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul” (Psalm 19:7a) and “My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity” (Proverbs 3:1-2).<sup>53</sup> These are the promises of God to us. God’s words bring order to the chaos of this world.<sup>54</sup> Using a practice like *lectio divina* provides the possibility for these passages to come to fruition in producing the shalom-oriented life.

There is enough evidence from the social sciences and from scripture itself to warrant this expectation: a continual 30-day practice of *lectio divina* will assist in moving a Christian from a more fear-oriented life to a more shalom-oriented life. This is the problem that I am studying and this is a solution I am hoping to validate.

This thesis-project will be broken up into four subsequent chapters to unpack the relevant data from a broad spectrum of convergent fields. In chapter two, we will examine the theological evidence and justification for this topic. What does the shalom-oriented life look like throughout scripture? In chapter three, we will explore the academic and popular level literature on shalom. This thesis-project will explore what other authors have written on the subject of shalom and its various intersections with the

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<sup>53</sup> Unless otherwise noted all scripture references are taken from the New International Version (2011).

<sup>54</sup> See Genesis 1:2-3.

fields of theology, psychology, spiritual formation, and neuroscience. In chapter four, we will discuss the project design and the methods used to gather data in the context of the local church. We will discuss the impact lectio divina has on the participants in moving them from a more fear-oriented life to a shalom-oriented life by examining the qualitative and quantitative data points.

Lastly, in chapter five, we will examine the outcomes of the project and the relative data to the shalom-oriented life.

The next question for us to answer is, what does the Bible tell us about the word shalom (שלום)? What is the theological framework for this rich Hebrew word? We will look at the lexical range of shalom and how the best translation of this Hebrew word is not first and foremost “peace” but “wholeness.” We will explore how scripture uses shalom and the implications found for the shalom-oriented life.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Shalom Introduction

Shalom (שָׁלוֹם) has been commonly translated “peace” or some derivative in English. But in a study of the evidence, shalom carries with it a broader and richer lexical definition than English accounts for. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. puts it this way:

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call *shalom*. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight*. . . . Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be. . . .

. . . In a shalomic state each entity [all communities, families, married couples, groups of friends, and individual human beings] would have its own integrity or structured wholeness, and each would also possess many edifying relations to other entities.<sup>1</sup>

Shalom carries with it the idea of wholeness and completeness in every state of affairs.

This means that shalom would be the ideal way of living not only for groups and organizations but also for individuals. Wholeness connects not only our relationships to one another in a collective setting but wholeness also relates to our own individual flourishing. The goal of this chapter will be to develop a theological framework of shalom and the implications for wholeness as the way life is supposed to be.

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 10. See also G. Lloyd Carr, “שָׁלוֹם” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1980), 931, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 82.

## Shalom and Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is a primary means by which shalom will be accomplished. The reality is formation is happening all the time. Whether an individual realizes it or not, they are being spiritually formed by something – this includes terrorists and saints.<sup>2</sup> The goal then is, “Spiritual formation in Christ . . . and its result is love of God. . . . The human self is then fully integrated under God.”<sup>3</sup> It is care of the soul that is “an assertion of wholeness, the totality of what it means to be a human being.”<sup>4</sup> The soul is the aspect of the human life that integrates all parts to form one life.<sup>5</sup> Our souls are either moving towards integration with God or moving towards disintegration as a soul turned in on itself.<sup>6</sup> We are called into the ‘dance of God’<sup>7</sup> with the vision of being formed into the likeness of Jesus. “Spiritual formation in Christ is the process by which one moves and is moved from self-worship to Christ-centered self-denial as a general condition of life in God’s present and eternal kingdom.”<sup>8</sup> This formation into Jesus means putting on the character of Christ. “[The spiritual formation movement] is now carried on through our

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<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 36.

<sup>5</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 42-43.

<sup>7</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 44-47.

<sup>8</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 77.

apprenticeship to Jesus Christ. It is a process of character transformation toward complete trustworthiness before God.”<sup>9</sup>

Spiritual formation in its truest form is discipleship where we learn to obey all that Jesus commanded and learn to live like him. In this way, we live into what it means to be truly human and live into the holistic life of the kingdom of God. This formation process is not an act of individualistic effort but “the Christian life is from beginning to end a work of divine grace.”<sup>10</sup> This enabling grace<sup>11</sup> is like breath and the more we lean into the vision of the kingdom the more grace God stands ready to give us.<sup>12</sup> So because we understand that grace is not opposed to effort but to earning we can develop a plan for spiritual formation.

The three main foundations to true spiritual formation are: 1. Scripture 2. Prayer 3. Reflection. The engagement with scripture is not an attempt simply to learn more about the Bible but is the attempt to use God’s word to bring mind, body, and soul into the life of the kingdom of God. Prayer is not simply offering up requests to God as if that is all the relationship entails but rather prayer becomes our way of life. Reflection is not naval gazing but is a core piece to true formation. This is the foundational assertion John Calvin made to begin the Institutes of the Christian Religion. He writes, “Nearly all the wisdom

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<sup>9</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 218.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 83.

<sup>12</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 93-94.

we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”<sup>13</sup>

This thesis-project will explore the connection between scripture (through the practice of lectio divina) and the implications for the shalom-oriented life. The goal of approaching God through scripture is transformation. When we enter into the pages of scripture we find that God is ready to meet us there. “When we open the Bible...[God] will meet us face to face on the holy ground of these pages. When we open the Bible, it does not say to us, ‘Listen: God is there!’ Instead, the voice of the Spirit whispers through each line, ‘Look: I am here!’”<sup>14</sup> This is a foundational piece to lectio divina. It is reading with an awareness that God speaks through his scripture in the present to us.

When we approach scripture in this way, we find that it is a book that captivates us and speaks to our personal lives.<sup>15</sup> So if we approach scripture as ‘lovers’, we will find that God will speak to us in ways that form us to life in the kingdom. Webb writes,

The theorist aims for mastery of the text. But such mastery is elusive. There is always more to study, always more to learn...the end result of aiming to master the Bible is always the same: it dies in our hands. There is however, another way: the way of the lover. A lover does not seek to master the Bible but rather to be seduced by it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.1.

<sup>14</sup> Chris Webb, *Fire of the Word* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 61.

<sup>15</sup> Webb, *Fire of the Word*, 53.

<sup>16</sup> Webb, *Fire of the Word*, 63.

As Peterson also puts it, “exegesis is an act of love.”<sup>17</sup> And when we approach scripture in this way, we find that God is able to speak to our hearts.<sup>18</sup> Through lectio divina, positive spiritual formation takes place and the end result is the shalom-oriented life. It is life in the kingdom of God and it is the only life worth seeking.

### Shalom and Lexical Study

The noun shalom occurs over 250 times in the Hebrew Old Testament.<sup>19</sup> The Septuagint translates shalom using the various members of the εἰρήνη, τέλειος, and σώζω word groups. Because of the Semitic background of shalom, it was influential in helping to broaden the Greek lexical range to include the Semitic ideas of growth and prosperity.<sup>20</sup>

Shalom’s roots are attested to in all branches of Semitic languages. In Ugaritic, shalom carries with it the idea to “be intact, whole.”<sup>21</sup> In Akkadian, the cognates are “become intact, whole, complete, pay in full, well, return, satisfied, make whole, bring safely.”<sup>22</sup> In Syriac, the root appears in the lexical range, “completeness, perfection,

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<sup>17</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 55.

<sup>18</sup> Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Carr, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 931.

<sup>20</sup> Carr, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 931

<sup>21</sup> F.J. Stendebach, “שָׁלוֹם” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), XV:16.

<sup>22</sup> Stendebach, “שָׁלוֹם,” 16.

harmony, and consummation (sex act).”<sup>23</sup> The Arabic cognates are “peace, reconciliation, submission, subjection.”<sup>24</sup> Because of some of the various forms that are found through the lexical study, there are some who reject the idea that there can be a basic meaning to the word. Gerleman writes,

One must seek the basic meaning of the root in actual linguistic usage, where a clearly distinguished semantic content is evident. Only on the basis of a scrutiny of the entire semantic realm can one hope to find a concrete and perceptible usage of the word that can be regarded as the central kernel and beginning of a demonstrable semantic development. Thus it soon becomes apparent that the multifaceted semantic range of the noun שָׁלוֹם offers no advantageous starting point.<sup>25</sup>

Others find issue with narrowing down the basic meaning because shalom has common uses as well as religious ones making it difficult to find a comprehensive meaning. Gerhard von Rad states, “Seldom do we find in the Old Testament a word which to the same degree as shalom can bear a common use and yet can also be filled with a concentrated religious content far above the level of the average conception.”<sup>26</sup> For von Rad, shalom is intimately connected with well-being and a strong emphasis on the material side of the bodily health and prosperity of a community and relationships in the

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<sup>23</sup> Stendebach, “שָׁלוֹם,” 17.

<sup>24</sup> Stendebach, “שָׁלוֹם,” 17.

<sup>25</sup> G. Gerleman, “שָׁלוֹם” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 3:1340. See also Stendebach, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> Gerhard von Rad, “שָׁלוֹם in the OT” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 2:402.

common life.<sup>27</sup> While this view is definitely a piece of shalom and its outworking, there still seems to be a basic understanding of wholeness and completion that undergirds the root of this word. Walter Brueggemann summarizes that shalom carries with it the vision worth living towards:

That persistent vision of joy, well-being, harmony, and prosperity is not captured in any single word or idea in the Bible, and a cluster of words is required to express its many dimensions and subtle nuances: love, loyalty, truth, grace, salvation, justice, blessing, righteousness. But the term that in recent discussions has been used to summarize that controlling vision is shalom. . . . The vision of wholeness, which is the supreme will of the biblical God, is the outgrowth of a covenant of shalom.<sup>28</sup>

Shalom, according to Brueggemann, ultimately forms the foundation and vision for existence. It is the picture of the way things are supposed to be.<sup>29</sup> There is an objective value to shalom that does not exist with other words in its semantic range. Shalom is the “comprehensive kind of fulfillment or completion, indeed of a perfection in life and spirit which quite transcends any success which man alone, even under the best of circumstances, is able to attain.”<sup>30</sup> Because shalom holds together the foundation for life with God, others, and ourselves, it is imperative that a comprehensive study is done to explore the implications of shalom-oriented living as the vision for all of life.

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<sup>27</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 1:130.

<sup>28</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision* (Philadelphia, PA: United Church Press, 1976), 15-17.

<sup>29</sup> Gerleman, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 3:1348. Shalom should be primarily understood as an objective entity and value as opposed to more subjective ones within its semantic range like ‘good’ (טוֹב) which is used more in reference to perception from one vantage point.

<sup>30</sup> John I. Durham, “שְׁלוֹמִי and the Presence of God” in *Proclamation and Presence*, ed. John I. Durham and J.R. Porter (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 280.

## Shalom and the Created Order

When God began his work in Genesis 1 he was creating a world with shalom as a primary attribute to the chaos that was there.

### Genesis

Now the earth was formless and empty [תֹהוֹ וָבֹהוּ], darkness was over the surface of the deep.

—Genesis 1:2a

God began his work of bringing shalom to the primordial chaos.<sup>31</sup> God's spirit hovers over the chaos, and he begins his redemptive work. It could be argued that shalom truly is the foundation to God's creative work in putting all things to right and the "state of existence in accordance with Yahweh's created order."<sup>32</sup> When God's shalom is not present there is a relinquishing of space back over to the chaos and to תֹהוֹ וָבֹהוּ. This can be worked out in several passages, and from one perspective the chaos is already at work in the natural world.

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<sup>31</sup> See Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 29: "Genesis does not explicitly address the issue of whether God started from nothing. That claim, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, finds more plausible basis in such texts as Hebrews 1:3 and 2 Maccabees 7:28."

<sup>32</sup> Philip J. Nel, "שְׁלוֹם" in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 131.

## Mark

A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. . . . The disciples woke [Jesus] and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

—Mark 4:37-39

While the word is not translated shalom in this passage, the connection still applies to God’s restorative work in the natural world. The storm at sea represents all the same chaotic forces that are found in Genesis 1:2. Brueggemann states it well that the plan is “to bring fundamental disorder under God’s rule. . . . Creation in Genesis and [the ministry of] Jesus is the establishment of shalom in a universe that apart from God’s rule is disordered, unproductive, and unfulfilling.”<sup>33</sup> This same picture of chaos unravelling shalom is found in the disobedience of the people of God.

## Jeremiah

“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.” I looked at the earth and it was formless and empty [תהוֹ וְבִהוּ]; and at the heavens, and their light was gone.

—Jeremiah 4:22-23

This is a staggering study of creation reverted to chaos again. God longs for his people to live in the shalom he has for them, but they have refused. There is an unravelling of the order he has built into the world, and now the chaos and disorder are experienced in every dimension of life. This is “a rhetorical attempt to engage this

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<sup>33</sup> Brueggeman, *Living Toward a Vision*, 17-18.

numbed, unaware community in an imaginative embrace of what is happening. The world is becoming unglued. . . . The verdict of the initial creation was, ‘It is very good’ (Gen. 1:31). Here the verdict is, ‘It is very evil.’ Such evil finally must be answered for.”<sup>34</sup> God’s good world is fixed with his longing for infusing all things with shalom. This is God’s ideal for his creation and for his people – that they would experience the wholeness that is found in him and his nature. This is God’s command and desire for us.

## Matthew

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

—Matthew 5:48

This passage has been misunderstood and interpreted in many fashions. There is one interpretation that sees this perfection (τέλειος) as unattainable: “God’s righteousness is impossible for the very reason that it is perfect. But the impossible righteousness becomes possible for those who trust in Jesus Christ. . . . That is precisely our Lord’s point in all these illustrations..., to lead his audience to an overpowering sense of spiritual bankruptcy.”<sup>35</sup> Others interpret this section completely within the context of nonviolence and loving our enemies.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 61.

<sup>35</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr, *Matthew 1-7* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1985), 350.

<sup>36</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 72-73. I do agree with Hauerwas that nonviolence is connected to τέλειος but more as an outworking of a better understanding of τέλειος and shalom. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Bible Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 135.

The best understanding of τέλειος from Matthew 5:48 is the connection to shalom and God's desire for his people to experience his wholeness in all forms. This wholeness or completeness is understood in our relationship to God's law,<sup>37</sup> in our relationship to loving our enemies,<sup>38</sup> and in our "strong invitation to participate in God's perfection by imitating the divine behavior."<sup>39</sup> This understanding allows us to see that God's invitation into the shalom-oriented life exists well into the New Testament and the life of his kingdom. Not only is this an invitation to live into "imitating the divine behavior" but in the process of embracing shalom in our lives we actually become the truest picture of what it means to be human. William Stringfellow writes, "Becoming and being a saint, does not mean being perfect but being whole; it does not mean being exceptionally religious or being religious at all; it means being liberated from religiosity and religious pietism of any sort. . . . [It means] being truly human."<sup>40</sup> Living life within the shalom of God offers humanity the greatest potential to realize life as it was supposed to be. The goal in the next section is to develop a comprehensive view of shalom and the implications for a biblical theology.

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<sup>37</sup> W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 1, ed. J.A. Emerton, C.E.B. Cranfield, and G.N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 2000), 599.

<sup>38</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 135.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation Bible Commentary, ed. James Luther (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 61. See also Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 205.

<sup>40</sup> William Stringfellow, *A Keeper of the Word*, ed. Bill Wylie Kellermann (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 311-312.

## Shalom and the Implications

Throughout this section, the goal will be to develop a comprehensive look at the use of shalom and the implications for a biblical theology. I will discuss some sections in detail regarding a particular scripture passage because of its relevance to shalom and other topics I will connect multiple passages.

### Shalom and the Priestly Blessing

One of the most well-known sections of scripture that speaks to the implications of shalom is found in the book of Numbers. It has commonly been called the priestly blessing or the Aaronic blessing.

### Numbers

“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace [שְׁלוֹם].”

—Numbers 6:24-27

This type of priestly blessing was not only found within the Israelite community but reflects a common ancient Near Eastern rhetorical pattern.<sup>41</sup> There was a standard Ugaritic salutation, “May the gods watch over you and bring you well-being,” which parallels closely the Akkadian salutation, “May the gods protect you for well-being.”<sup>42</sup> This blessing in Numbers “seems to call not only for God’s favor now, but also evokes an

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<sup>41</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, The Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 237.

<sup>42</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 237.

eschatological longing for the full revelation and presence of God on earth, a presence that ultimately brings the fullness of God's grace and a final Sabbath peace."<sup>43</sup> There is a longing for "the reality of the presence of God [that] stands at the center of biblical faith."<sup>44</sup> The presence of God with his people not only means covenantal communion between God and Israel, but his presence results ultimately in shalom.<sup>45</sup> This is a driving value that explains why the prophets encouraged the people of Israel to seek the LORD while he is near (Isaiah 55:6). Shalom is the gift of God that can only be received in his presence.<sup>46</sup>

A study of the priestly blessing reveals the author's intentional formatting to build to the concluding shalom. The threefold blessing is a rising crescendo from three to five to seven words and from 15 to 20 to 25 consonants with a clear and careful construction. The lengthening is a movement towards the seventh word of the final line, "shalom!"<sup>47</sup> This writing is suggestive by the author to move the people of Israel toward the seventh day of Sabbath peace.<sup>48</sup> There is a clear connection between the presence of God and

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<sup>43</sup> David L. Stubbs, *Numbers*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 69. Contra Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 242 where he sees the blessing fulfilled only in the afterlife.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishing, 1978), xxvii.

<sup>45</sup> Stubbs, *Numbers*, 73.

<sup>46</sup> Durham, "שָׁלוֹם and the Presence of God," 292.

<sup>47</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 51.

<sup>48</sup> Stubbs, *Numbers*, 74.

“turning his face” towards his people that will result in giving them shalom.<sup>49</sup> This blessing of shalom became an indicative mark on the people of God and may be the impetus for the New Testament salutation “grace and peace.”<sup>50</sup> This priestly blessing found its way into the New Testament because there was a close association between Christ and the shalom-oriented life found in union with him.

### Shalom and Scripture

The power of scripture cannot be overstated. It is a vehicle and a means that God uses to bring about the shalom-oriented life. There is a reason the psalmist declares, “The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul” (Psalm 19:7). Wisdom literature speaks to the connection shalom has with scripture.

### Proverbs

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace [שְׁלֹמִים] and prosperity.  
—Proverbs 3:2

The shalom-oriented life is available through the commandments where the individual has “every sufficiency and good fortune, free from hostility and lack, and [is]

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<sup>49</sup> Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R.K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 152.

<sup>50</sup> Stubbs, *Numbers*, 75.

so filled with inner contentment, delight, joy, and pleasure as a gift from God.”<sup>51</sup> This is the life available to all who would submit themselves to scripture and to the presence of God. Nel writes, “In the Wisdom literature the expectation exists that someone who lives in accordance with the prescriptions of wisdom will experience a long life and peace.”<sup>52</sup> God has established his world to be lived within the framework of his words because in them his people find life and shalom.<sup>53</sup> This is not to say that the wicked cannot prosper in this life. Clearly, from the scripture there was some misunderstanding and contention with the wicked prospering in this life while the righteous were languishing. But the shalom that we receive is a fulfillment that transcends the circumstances of life. Peter Cragie puts it this way:

In the short run, the wicked seem to prosper whereas the righteous very often seem to suffer at their hands. But it is the longer run that counts, and in the long run the only true satisfaction is to be found in the righteousness which is the hallmark of the one who lives in relationship with the living God. . . . [The] question [is] determining the God-given purpose in human life and then living in accord with it; that is the essence of life.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R.K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 240.

<sup>52</sup> Nel, “שְׁלוֹם,” 131. There is a close connection between shalom and health that will be explored later.

<sup>53</sup> There are many scripture references that speak to the idea of shalom, life, and obeying God’s commands. Psalm 1:3 is a perfect example. Though shalom is not mentioned, the image is a life of flourishing and wholeness as God intends. See also Isaiah 32:17; Ezekiel 20:18-21.

<sup>54</sup> Peter C. Cragie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 299.

## Isaiah

“If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace [שלום] would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea.”

—Isaiah 48:18

There is a close connection between shalom, commandments, and righteousness. The one who lives righteously (obeying God’s commands) will experience shalom. This passage “makes it evident that peace and righteousness flow from observance of Yahweh’s commands and can be seen as his blessing.”<sup>55</sup> This section of Isaiah 48 creates a vivid picture of the imagery between shalom and a river. If the people of Israel had obeyed God’s commandments, then shalom would have been like a river. The imagery of a river in the Old Testament conveys the idea of abundance and the favor of God.<sup>56</sup> This blessing is sacrificed if the people reject the commandments and the shalom that is extended to them.

At the same time, those who reject God’s commandments (the wicked) are choosing to live outside the design he has for humanity. “There is no peace...for the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22).<sup>57</sup> God has given his people a way of living that is not meant to bring death but life and wholeness (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

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<sup>55</sup> Nel, “שלום,” 132.

<sup>56</sup> Durham, “שלום and the Presence of God,” 280.

<sup>57</sup> See Plantinga, *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, 14, where sin is defined as the vandalism of shalom and humanity is considered culpable shalom-breakers.

## Shalom and Health

There is value to people's health when they embrace the shalom-oriented life. This can be seen in psychological flourishing<sup>58</sup> but also in physical flourishing. There is a very close connection between life and shalom.<sup>59</sup>

### Psalms

Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; there is no soundness [שְׁלֹמָה] in my bones because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. . . . My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body.

— Psalm 38:3-4, 7

David sees a clear connection between his waywardness and his ill health. It was common in the ancient Near East to connect punishment from the gods for a transgression whether deliberate or unintentional.<sup>60</sup> The idea of God shooting arrows (38:2) could possibly be a borrowed portrayal from Resheph, the Ugaritic master divine archer god who shoots illness at people.<sup>61</sup> However, even amidst the obvious consciousness of the ancient culture, Psalm 38 begins to suggest that the unravelling of shalom and its effects on our health are a consequence within the waywardness itself as

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<sup>58</sup> This will be developed in detail in further chapters.

<sup>59</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1990), 373. See also this connection in Proverbs 3:16-18.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 134.

<sup>61</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1-50*, Anchor Bible Commentary, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Company, 1966), 235.

opposed to coming primarily from the direct hand of God.<sup>62</sup> As David further explains, “My guilt has overwhelmed me,”<sup>63</sup> he experiences a psychological drowning because of his actions. There is a clear languishing both of the physical body and the psychological state because of the wayward living.<sup>64</sup> The psalmist connects this languishing to his stupidity. The connection becomes clear and ironic when he says, “I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long” (Psalm 38:6).<sup>65</sup> There is a sense that in the bending and perverting of God’s straight ways<sup>66</sup> that waywardness brought on a bending of the body in the unravelling of health.<sup>67</sup> The shalom-oriented life should produce a better trajectory between our health (physically and psychologically) and the ways of flourishing. Jesus’ words echo this truth, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a).

<sup>63</sup> כִּי, עֲוֹנָי: I prefer the translation of, “My iniquities” better because it is connected directly to the action.

<sup>64</sup> Contra John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, vol. 1, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 541. Goldingay draws a strong line between the total loss of physical health in the body and the psychological state of the individual. This is not consistent with latest research detailing psychological trauma and its effects in the body. See Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> New American Standard Bible, 1995.

<sup>66</sup> Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 40:3; Psalm 107:7; Psalm 5:8.

<sup>67</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 542.

<sup>68</sup> See also Psalm 16:5-9. Though there is no reference to shalom in this chapter, the life fixed on God yields the same result which is a healthy body.

## Shalom and Relationships

Shalom is multi-faceted. It means wholeness not only with God and ourselves, but also with others. In fact, one of the key outworkings of shalom is within the context of our relationships. There really are no more important avenues than seeing shalom transform our relationships.

### Jeremiah

“From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace [שָׁלוֹם שָׁלוֹם],’ they say, when there is no peace.”

—Jeremiah 6:13-14

There are easy ways that people can deceive themselves into believing they are living the shalom-oriented life but find they have missed it. Shalom in relationships does not come easy.<sup>69</sup> Shalom invades relationships by moving humanity beyond self-seeking and personal advancement. Leslie Allen writes,

It is the shalom sense of well-being, experienced by the person who lives a caring, sharing, joyous life in community. By way of contrast, covetousness is presented as one aspect of the self-seeking life which is never satiated but always pursues selfish security only to discover that it leads to destruction. . . . The prophetic vision of shalom stands against all private arrangements, all “separate peaces,” all ghettos, that pretend the others are not there.<sup>70</sup>

The shalom-oriented life is best seen in our relationships when our pursuits for self-advancement are relinquished for the concern and care of others. There is also a glaring issue of false-shalom prophets found throughout the pages of the Latter and Minor

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<sup>69</sup> Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 20-21.

Prophets. There was ignorance at best to the importance of the Temple and the perceived indestructability of it and deception at worst.<sup>71</sup>

## Isaiah

“All your children will be taught by the LORD, and great will be their peace [שְׁלוֹם]. In righteousness you will be established..., you will have nothing to fear.”

—Isaiah 54:13-14b

There was a wholeness available to the people of God that would affect all of their relationships. There was a way of living that would transcend the common life in the ancient world. “The disciples of the Lord, the ones filled with his Spirit, are no longer at war with God. They are thus no longer at war with themselves. They are not at war with others, so that they can aggrandize themselves. . . . Such persons have wholeness in themselves, and that wholeness affects all their relationships.”<sup>72</sup> There is a wholeness that moves us beyond fear and beyond self-interest and to the heart of relationships flourishing through a collective caring and security.

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<sup>71</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah*, Old Testament Library, ed. William P. Brown, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 81, 86. See also Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R.K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 405-407.

<sup>72</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R.K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 428.

## Colossians

Let the peace of Christ (ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ) rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

—Colossians 3:15

The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Colossae and in this section exhorts the church to the importance of peace in their relationships with one another. Peter O’Brien writes, “Here peace occurs in an exhortation to the readers to let Christ’s peace hold sway in their lives as they relate to one another.”<sup>73</sup> William Hendriksen writes,

[The church was] called as a body, for from eternity they had been viewed as a corporate entity “in Christ.” In time they were “called” in order that they might promote spiritual oneness in every way. Now this purpose can be accomplished only when the peace of Christ rules in their heart. . . . Let him be sure to be at peace with God, for only then can he expect to live in true harmony with his brothers.”<sup>74</sup>

The peace of Christ will fill our hearts and give us the power to love others. Paul tells us to let this peace rule (βραβεύω). This Greek word was originally used to refer to the function of the umpire who presided over and presented the prizes during the ancient games.<sup>75</sup> The invitation is simple from Paul: Will you allow Christ’s peace to be the umpire over your life? The shalom-oriented life will bring great rewards to the relationships God has asked you to steward.

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<sup>73</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 204.

<sup>74</sup> William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964), 159.

<sup>75</sup> O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, 204.

## Shalom and Fear

Shalom is the life we were created to live – it is a life of flourishing and wholeness with God, others, and ourselves. But one primary deterrent from shalom-oriented living is the in-breaking and consuming nature of fear in its various forms.<sup>76</sup>

There is a reason, “the LORD said to [Gideon], ‘Peace [שָׁלוֹם]! Do not be afraid’” (Judges 6:23). Fear is a common motivator that can overtake God’s people.

### Psalms

Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound. In peace [שָׁלוֹם] I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

—Psalm 4:7-8

This is a powerful Psalm to speak to the fear-oriented life and the shalom that is found only in God. There was a legitimate fear of no food to eat and foes that would be faced that caused sleepless nights, but the psalmist recalls God, and he finds shalom when fear dominates his life. This psalm is an echo of the Aaronic blessing found in the book of Numbers.<sup>77</sup> The psalmist celebrated his victory over this anxiety and fear. He found shalom even amidst “the accusations of the sons of man [which] had created that inner tension and anxiety which makes sleep impossible, the Lord granted that security within which sleep could be a time of rest and tranquility. . . . He could lie on his bed and sleep

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<sup>76</sup> My next chapter will delve into shalom-oriented living and its implications for fear which is a primary driver and motivator in its various forms (i.e. insecurity, anxiety, depression and control).

<sup>77</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 124.

the sleep of peace which came from God.”<sup>78</sup> What must be crystal clear in the study of shalom and fear is how rarely the circumstances actually change externally. Rarely does the person who had more food than you cease to have more food, or rarely does the army attacking cease to attack you. The external circumstances causing the fear rarely subside, or if they do subside they are replaced by another consuming fear. The power of shalom is not found in its ability to change our circumstances but in the power to change our perspective. Peter Cragie writes,

There is no suggestion in this psalm that the accusers go away or cease in their accusations. What changes as a consequence of prayer is not the external circumstance, but the inner spirit of the worshipper. The accusations are like barbs in the mind, needling and prodding, causing anxiety, prayer leads to that calmness of mind in which the accusations can be accepted and carried, for a greater peace of mind has come from God.<sup>79</sup>

God meets the needs of his people and gives them an interior freedom to embrace every moment and every situation with his shalom.

## **John**

“Peace (εἰρήνη) I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”  
—John 14:27

Jesus speaks to his followers as his earthly ministry closes. Jesus reminds them that despite the circumstances, his followers can have peace right in the middle of their

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<sup>78</sup> Cragie, *Psalms 1-50*, 82.

<sup>79</sup> Cragie, *Psalms 1-50*, 82.

fears. “Jesus aims to instill peace right in the hearts of the disciples.”<sup>80</sup> Jesus came to offer a peace that was “tranquility in the midst of hardship.”<sup>81</sup> This tranquility is found when we exercise faith in God and contemplate the gracious promises found in him.<sup>82</sup> The peace Jesus offers is “something deeper and more lasting, peace at heart which would banish anxiety and fear.”<sup>83</sup> Jesus speaks against this negative fear “to be afraid.” It is the only time this Greek verb (δελιάω) is used in the New Testament, and all instances in Greek literature reveal that it is never used positively. Jesus can banish the negative fears that plague us and consume us.

## John

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace [εἰρήνη] be with you!”

—John 20:19

Jesus appears to his disciples who are terrified of the Jewish leaders. These leaders had orchestrated the execution of Jesus and now they were fearful for their own lives.<sup>84</sup> This is one of the main reasons John comments on the doors that are locked: “Were the apostles going to be next on the program of destruction [by the Jewish

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<sup>80</sup> William Hendriksen, *John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 287.

<sup>81</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 982.

<sup>82</sup> Hendriksen, *John*, 287.

<sup>83</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 305.

<sup>84</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1200.

leaders]?”<sup>85</sup> Jesus offers similar words on peace to his disciples in this passage. The disciples would have remembered how recently Jesus talked about peace, yet it must have seemed like years ago because of all that had transpired since then.<sup>86</sup> Jesus offers his disciples the formal Jewish greeting, “Peace [שלום] be with you.” This is not simply a formal greeting from Jesus, but he offers “actual peace to his disciples on an occasion when they need it, and this functions as an encouragement to John’s audience, who also face oppression.”<sup>87</sup> In the midst of uncertainty that brings fear, Jesus offers the shalom-oriented life.

### **Philippians**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God [ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ] which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:6-7

Paul writes to the church in Philippi from a prison cell. He is in chains. The phrase “the peace of God [ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ]” is connected to the previous verse on anxiousness. Despite what happens to them, God’s peace will always be available. Peter O’Brien writes, “This promise about God’s peace guarding the Philippians is given irrespective of whether their concrete requests are granted or not. This word of assurance is independent of their petitions being answered by God in the affirmative. God’s peace

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<sup>85</sup> Hendriksen, *John*, 458.

<sup>86</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 391.

<sup>87</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1202.

will be powerfully at work in their lives.”<sup>88</sup> Whatever anxiety comes our way, we have the peace of God. This is the only time this phrase, “the peace of God,” is used in the New Testament. However, the passage denotes a genitive of designation whereby we receive the peace that God already possesses within himself. God is not prone to anxieties and fears. The peace of God in this passage is a peace that God embodies and a peace that he gives to his children.<sup>89</sup>

### Shalom and the Source

There is a strong biblical theology that speaks to God being the foundation and source of the shalom that humanity is looking for. There is woven into the fabric of the created order a longing for the shalom that has been lost and needs to be restored. The Bible speaks very clearly to the source of shalom being God himself.

### Isaiah

You will keep in perfect peace [שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם] those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the rock eternal. . . . LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

—Isaiah 26:3-4, 12

These verses tell us that the shalom and wholeness we are looking for is found directly in God. The passage is literally “peace peace” and this is a common idiom of

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<sup>88</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 495-96.

<sup>89</sup> O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 496.

duplication to denote emphasis.<sup>90</sup> This understanding carries with it the idea of “complete peace,” as a way to live, found only in trusting God. Moreover, the song of praise draws a strong symbolism between God and a rock. Now a rock in itself was a symbol of reliability and durability, and the author is communicating clearly that God is not only a reliable “rock” but that he is the rock eternal (Isaiah 26:4).<sup>91</sup> He will always be the one to count on and will always be the source of shalom. The God of the Israelites is the only source where true shalom is found. This truth stands contrary to our usual impulse towards self-sufficiency. Oswalt says it this way:

[A] person will never know the wholeness...[if] they believe the lie that we are independent and have in ourselves the keys to ultimate success in life. The person who refuses the blandishments of such an idea and steadfastly looks to God can know an inner oneness which makes possible a confident outlook on the darkest scene.<sup>92</sup>

The real question ultimately comes down to who or what will you trust for shalom? All of humanity is looking for it, but where will you turn? This was the fundamental problem affecting Judah as this time: Who will they turn to for security?<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 213. See this idiom also in Isaiah 24:16, 27:5, and 57:19.

<sup>91</sup> Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, A Continental Commentary, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 548.

<sup>92</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R.K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 472.

<sup>93</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 472.

## **Psalms**

May those who delight in my vindication shout for joy and gladness; may they always say, “The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being [שְׁלוֹם] of his servant.”

—Psalm 35:27

Joy and delight are found in God. Moreover, there is joy and delight God desires to give away! God desires to see his people flourishing and embracing the shalom-oriented life.<sup>94</sup> This psalm of David addresses the attackers and the prospect of calamity that feels imminent. God delights to bless and be the source of shalom for his people. He addresses their trouble by giving his shalom in every situation.

## **Shalom and Jesus**

Shalom is intimately connected with several passages of messianic expectation in the Old Testament. Therefore, these passages will not speak of Jesus directly, but they are prophecies that will find fulfillment in Christ himself.

## **Isaiah 53**

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace [שְׁלוֹם] was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

—Isaiah 53:5

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<sup>94</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 502.

The Servant in this passage is not suffering with his people; rather he is suffering for them and obtaining through his actions what they could not obtain for themselves.<sup>95</sup> The Servant has obtained the shalom the people are looking for but have not found. The imagery of this passage carries with it the discipline of a parental relationship with a child.<sup>96</sup> The parent's authority has not been recognized or obeyed; therefore, shalom has been lost. This is not the scene "of a raging tyrant who demands violence on someone to satisfy his fury. It is a God who wants a whole relationship with his people."<sup>97</sup> The Servant's work has brought redemption for our sinful state (53:5a-b), our alienation from God (53:5c), and our broken priesthood (53:5d).<sup>98</sup> This punishment was needed to restore the possibility of shalom between God and humanity. Jesus is the truest picture of a God who came near. The wholeness we needed was fractured, and Jesus brought us shalom with God. The healing that Jesus gives us is a healing of the person, "restoring fullness and completeness."<sup>99</sup> This is the shalom-oriented life that is found in Jesus.

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<sup>95</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 388.

<sup>96</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 388. See Proverbs 22:15 and Proverbs 23:13 where מִצָּר (mitsar) carries with it the idea of punishment/discipline for correction by a parent. See John Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 72.

<sup>97</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 388.

<sup>98</sup> Moyter, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 430.

<sup>99</sup> Moyter, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 431.

## Isaiah 9

For to us a child is born, to us a song is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace [פֶּלֶאֱוֶן].

—Isaiah 9:6

This designation of titles for the coming king was not a new concept in the ancient Near Eastern world. There was a connection of the bestowal of great titles upon the royal child that existed in other cultures and most likely has its roots in Egypt.

Wildberger comments on the Egyptian tradition:

The full title [for the royal child] consisted of five parts. For example, for Harmhab, they were as follows: (1) Mighty Bull, Ready in Plans; (2) Great in Marvels in Karnak; (3) Satisfied with Truth, Creator of the Two Lands; (4) Zeserkheprure (= Beaming is the Nature of Re), Setepnere (= Chosen by Re); (5) Mernamon (= Loved by Amon), Harmhad, given life.<sup>100</sup>

These titles were so important in the ancient world that they were part of every culture as a way of thinking about the royal families and their connections to the gods.<sup>101</sup> The close association between the king and the gods existed because the earthly king was the representative for the heavenly king and was the stand-in on earth. Though “prince” is used here in Isaiah, it is not a deprecation of kingship. Rather, he is the ruler in Jerusalem who is more than a king “with his own absolute power or one who rules by the will of the people; he carries out God’s dominion upon the earth.”<sup>102</sup> Jesus, the ruler who brings

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<sup>100</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 402.

<sup>101</sup> See also Dahood, *Psalms 1-50*, 11. This practice was also found in Canaan in Ugaritic texts. For example, “Legitimate Lord, Governor of the Palace, King of the City, Builder King.”

<sup>102</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 402.

shalom, is carrying out the kingdom of God on the earth. Given the divine title motif that was common in the ancient world, it is compelling that “Prince of Peace” was one that would mark the reign of Jesus. Because he is the prince that does not diminish his value or ability to execute shalom, rather he has the divine prerogative to implement far more than his princely powers because he is the viceroy representing the heavenly King. Shalom is a dominant marker of Jesus’ work in the world.

## **Psalms**

In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound [רָבַץ שְׁלֹמֹה] till the moon is no more. May he rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

—Psalm 72:7-8

Some have come to the conclusion that Psalm 72 is a coronation psalm of a present king and should not be thought of as messianic in nature nor referring to Jesus.<sup>103</sup> However, there does seem to be more evidence that supports a nuanced messianic interpretation. There are too many descriptions and intimate connectors to God’s ultimate design in this psalm to deny its messianic context. Hans-Joachim Kraus writes,

The effective wishful words tend toward an expectation, to a hope for salvation, which in the Old Testament turns up also in the messianic prophecies. . . . The expectations of the prayer of blessing look forward to “God’s deliverer” in whom the “reign of God” on earth, in the people of God and at the same time among the nations, finds its fulfillment.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms: 42-49*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, vol. 2, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 382.

<sup>104</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, Continental Commentary, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 81.

There was a longing for the king who would come and share YHWH's throne (Psalm 110:1). This messianic king will rule with the power of God and extend his abundant shalom (שָׁלוֹם) to all creation. This is a major aspect to his kingdom and to the way that he rules. "[Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near" (Ephesians 2:17).<sup>105</sup>

There are some similarities between Jesus and an eschatological shalom. There is a clear sense that Jesus picks up many of the themes of shalom in his ministry that were associated with the eschatological kingdom.<sup>106</sup> Jesus gives us a new vision for viewing the world and a new vision for how we view God. Bradley Jersak comments, "Jesus reveals the true nature of the kingdom of God, not as an overbearing, militant empire but as shalom: a culture of harmony, wholeness and peace."<sup>107</sup> This is the life and invitation that God extends to us every day if only we would receive the life of shalom that is available.

### **The Shalom-Oriented Life**

One goal of this chapter was to sketch in a comprehensive but not exhaustive sense the overwhelming invitation to the shalom-oriented life found only in God. This way of life will bring peace not only in our relationships but also wholeness within us.

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<sup>105</sup> See also Isaiah 57:18-19, "I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; I will guide them and restore comfort to Israel's mourners, creating praise on their lips. Peace, peace [שָׁלוֹם], to those far and near," says the LORD. "And I will heal them."

<sup>106</sup> For instance, the echo of Psalm 37:11, "But the meek...enjoy peace [שָׁלוֹם] and prosperity" is found in Jesus' vision of the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:5). See also Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace [שָׁלוֹם]," and Mark 1:14-16.

<sup>107</sup> Bradley Jersak, *A More Christlike God* (Pasadena, CA: Plain Truth Ministries, 2015), 214.

This is the life God offers all humanity. One major vehicle that we found through this theological framework chapter is the power of scripture to lead us into the shalom-oriented life.<sup>108</sup> God's word guides, leads, instructs, and invites all of humanity into the life of shalom. The shalom-oriented life is sought by all and many have yet to find it.

A second goal of this chapter was to connect the biblical theology of shalom with fear. Rather than shalom-oriented living, most individuals (Christian and non-Christian) live lives driven by fear as a primary motivator. This fear that consumes us at a sub-conscious and conscious level takes many forms. Whether it is the insecurity of our appearance, the anxiety of our retirement, or a depression brought on by a lack of meaning and purpose in our lives, fear drives us and ultimately consumes us. It is no wonder that the Bible speaks ubiquitously to the issue of fear. Fear-oriented living can hold us back from the ways God wants to work in our lives. Fear can swallow us up leaving no hope and no expectations about God's promises for our future.<sup>109</sup> But cultivating the shalom-oriented life will produce confidence and security in uncertainty and replace the fear that can consume our lives.

When sharing the breadth of this project in conversation with others, there has been an overwhelmingly positive response. As the project has been explained, many have resonated with the idea of what shalom-oriented living would look like for them and the longing they see for it in their day-to-day lives. The follow-up conversation about fear-oriented living being a primary driver in our lives has also been received with great

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<sup>108</sup> Chapter 4 will explore my project and answer the question, "Can a consistent practice of *lectio divina* take an individual from a fear-oriented life and cultivate a shalom-oriented life?"

<sup>109</sup> Psalm 69:1.

acceptance. I sense that when individuals stop to assess the way they are living with some intentionality, they can see how fear has impacted and even dominated their lives. This chapter has been an attempt to speak to this need. A need, from a theological perspective, that has existed for a very long time.

Much has been written on the topic of shalom and its intersection with theology, spiritual practices, and neuroscience. The next chapter will explore the relevant literature on the discussion of the shalom-oriented life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In chapter two, the theological framework showed that the Hebrew word, שלום, is best translated as “wholeness” rather than “peace.” The word denotes the way God has always intended things to be. Therefore, שלום and wholeness should be used interchangeably as they will be in this chapter. Much has been written over the centuries and more recently on the topics of wholeness, spiritual practices, and neuroscience. What follows is a short discussion of some of the major voices speaking to the issues at hand. Some of these authors have already been quoted in previous pages. The goal of this chapter will be to give those interested in the topic a starting point if they wish to explore additional research. These authors, all experts in their fields, reinforce the argument of this work.

#### **Wholeness and Union with God**

One of the areas for finding wholeness in our lives is union with God. Jesus prayed a prayer that we would be one (John 17:20-21). This particular request has been understood to speak mainly to our unity within the church but there is deep connection to being one as Jesus and the Father are one in union. “Jesus is praying that you and I would live in a similar kind of relationship with God that he has as the revelation of true humanness in the image of God. Jesus is indicating that the purpose of the Christian life

is a life of loving union with God at the depths of our being.”<sup>1</sup> This union is found solely through loving Christ. Thomas Keating writes,

Transforming union is the goal of...the Christian spiritual journey. Despite its rarity, it should be regarded as the normal Christian life. We must then translate all our relationships – with God, ourselves, other people, and the cosmos – into this new perspective and way of being in the world. The principal means of reaching transforming union is the personal love of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

A growing love for Christ will keep us on the path to union with God.

This union is brought about through surrender to God. In the surrender, we find wholeness: “Union has to do with an overall harmony between one’s being and God himself, focusing particularly on surrender to his will as his Spirit becomes ours.”<sup>3</sup> This union with God is available to all of us: “God offered the perfect Communion, experienced within Father and Son and Spirit, to human beings – indeed, to all of creation – which was made to live in harmony and wholeness, in *shalom*, according to the Hebrew Scriptures. *Shalom* was God’s dream for the world, and it continues to be so.”<sup>4</sup>

The goal of living into this harmony was to reverse the effects of the ‘flesh’ and the false self. “*Sarx* is the ‘old Adam,’ Saint Paul’s term for the false self, the ego bent on self-preservation at any cost, including other people’s rights and needs.”<sup>5</sup> What we find in

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<sup>1</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 120.

<sup>3</sup> David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Chuck DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness: Busyness, Exhaustion and Healing the Divided Self* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 187.

<sup>5</sup> Keating, *Invitation to Love*, 13.

union with God is wholeness and therefore our true self. As Chuck DeGroat states, “Wholeness, it turns out, is our great inheritance, our deepest and truest self.”<sup>6</sup> It is living in the true self where we experience the divine life that was always ours. “Our true self is found clasped in God’s love. God has created us to be partakers of the divine nature, as Peter puts it (2 Peter 1:4), to find our wholeness in the very being of God, to be restored to fullness in the image of God, to live in loving union with God.”<sup>7</sup> This true self is found when we come to the end of our false self: “One of the deepest mysteries of a Christ-referenced life is that only by losing all, by becoming utterly devoid of all self-referenced dynamics, by becoming ‘nothingness’ do we gain all, do we gain a life [where] we enter into wholeness and fullness of life in loving union with God for the sake of others.”<sup>8</sup> When the false self is relinquished, there is a greater awareness to our union with God.

Sadly, this wholeness and union was lost. The life of shalom we were meant to experience is gone, and we are longing to reclaim that union. Unfortunately, “we have a vague remembrance that somewhere...everything was unified. . . . There was a mysterious wholeness...but [it] was lost.”<sup>9</sup> We recognize that this shalom was lost not only between God and us but also between others and creation. Richard Rohr writes,

The greatest dis-ease facing humanity right now is our profound and painful sense of disconnection. Disconnection from God, certainly, but also from ourselves (our bodies), from each other, and from our world. . . . The gift of the Trinity – and our

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<sup>6</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 117.

<sup>7</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 97.

<sup>9</sup> Keating, *Invitation to Love*, 37.

practical, felt experience of receiving this gift – offers a grounded reconnection with God, self, others, and the world.<sup>10</sup>

The Trinity brings wholeness back to us through integration. However, we can easily choose a life of pain that we will inevitably feel.

We are created to find our fullness of life in loving union with God. When we live in such a relationship, our lives are integrated; we possess a deeper inner stability and experience wholeness. When, however, we step out of that loving union with God, when we rebel against this essential reality of our being, we begin to experience the disintegration, instability and brokenness that result from uprooting our lives from their true center. God's relationship with us doesn't change. God continues to be the One whose love enfolds and indwells us. Stepping out of that relationship creates the radical disruptions in our being. The pain and suffering those disruptions bring into our lives we call the 'wrath of God.'<sup>11</sup>

Living life outside of God's design brings the unraveling of shalom in our present life.

Union with God is not something we find as if it is 'out there.' God's presence is in our midst. "We're all united to God, but only some of us know it. Most of us deny it and doubt it."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, our responsibility to this gracious God is to seek his face continually: "Christianity is not merely a philosophical theory or a moral code, but involves a direct sharing in divine life and glory, a transforming union with God 'face to face.'"<sup>13</sup> It is in this union where we experience the abundant life Jesus offered. *Union* and *abundant life* could be considered the same terms: "Jesus emphasized this when he

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 109

<sup>13</sup> Kallistos Ware, "The Eastern Tradition from The Tenth to the Twentieth Century," in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 246

said, ‘I came that they might have life and have it to the full’ (John 10:10). The abundant life is divine union, which includes the capacity to use all things as stepping stones to God rather than as ends in themselves.”<sup>14</sup> Every person, place, or thing we encounter has the potential to bring us closer to our union with God.

The Triune God himself extends to each one of us a loving invitation to enjoy the deepest longings of our souls. “Let us unceasingly impress upon every soul that the invitation of this gentle, loving savior expects nothing difficult or extraordinary of them. He is not making impossible demands. . . . When we long for God and his will we rejoice in it and that rejoicing is the fulfillment of our longing.”<sup>15</sup> It is in receiving this invitation that God brings restoration. Jean-Pierre De Caussade writes,

Since God, touched by their efforts to go forward in this way, goes ahead of them, as it were, to accomplish his purpose of leading them to this happy union with him; since they have reached that beautiful region where one breathes only submission and where one begins to possess God with love; since, at last, God himself, in his loving kindness, has taken the place of all their troubles and cares, and has made himself the mainspring of their actions.<sup>16</sup>

This union sometimes has been mistaken only to bring benefits beyond death. There is a resigning to the afterlife rather than a resolution to reclaim this present world with this wholeness. It is transformation for now: “The essence of Christian spirituality is following Christ on a journey of personal transformation. The distant land to which we are called is not heaven. Nor is it some external, physical place. . . . The

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<sup>14</sup> Keating, *Invitation to Love*, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Pierre De Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (New York: Harper Collins, 1982), 30.

<sup>16</sup> De Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, 13.

transformation that occurs in Christian spirituality moves from the inside out.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, our true home is available today: “The call was to ‘home on the road,’ to bring my real self before the real God, to be changed into his true image, to become all that God has made me to be. It was and is a longing to belong, to have a home for God in my heart.”<sup>18</sup> This union and wholeness has present implications because of the effects it can have on those around us: “When, in that moment, we live in loving union with God, our life becomes a place where others experience the presence of God’s love, mercy and grace touching their lives with cleansing, healing and liberating transformation.”<sup>19</sup> Union with God pervades our life bringing shalom to every area.

### Wholeness and Connection with God

As we find connection with God, God begins to work in transforming us. This transformation may happen even without our awareness. “Loving union with God...begins to become the reality of our life in the world in all relationships and situations. Gradually, probably without our awareness, God works a transformation within us.”<sup>20</sup> This connection is embracing the wonder of God. “And the God who calls us to attention is really calling us to the discovery of who we are: human beings made to pay attention – not to be ‘lost in the cosmos’ (the title of a Walker Percy novel about

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<sup>17</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Leighton Ford, *The Attentive Life: Discerning God’s Presence in All Things* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 94.

<sup>20</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 149

human longing) but rather, as Esther De Waal has written, to be ‘lost in wonder.’”<sup>21</sup> It is also to receive the embrace from God and allow him to shape our steps. “The life of faith is not at all ‘believing impossible things to be true’: actually, it is a much more vigilant path of learning how to rest in an Ultimate Love and how to rest in an Infinite Source.”<sup>22</sup> It is to be captured by the overwhelming power of God’s love: “Stepping into this [Trinity] flow is enough to satisfy you forever. It’s enough to make you content with the rest of your life. It’s enough to know you really are okay and the world is okay, too. This is what it means to be captured by the Triune flow.”<sup>23</sup>

This connection to God and wholeness is a life of discipleship and abiding.

Leighton Ford writes,

Each of us is called to a life patterned by Christ. A life not shaped by inner compulsions, or captive to outer expectations, but drawn by the inner voice of love. To listen to this voice, we need to pay careful attention to where our inner and outer selves disconnect and where they need to come together in a beautiful pattern that reflects Jesus, whose inner life with his Father and outer life of ministering to others were very much one.<sup>24</sup>

When we pattern our life after Christ and our will and spirit become conformed to God’s, we show evidence of “a disposition of our whole being, brought about by that Love which so likens and conforms us to God that we become able to experience Him mystically in and through our inmost selves, as if He were our very selves.”<sup>25</sup> We will

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<sup>21</sup> Ford, *The Attentive Life*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 97.

<sup>23</sup> Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 107.

<sup>24</sup> Ford, *The Attentive Life*, 12-13.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Merton, “The Inner Experience: Kinds of Contemplation (IV),” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 18 (1983): 206.

then be able to receive Jesus' invitation to an interior freedom for which we have been searching. "Jesus invites us to change the direction in which we are looking for happiness and to join the new humanity that is opening to interior freedom."<sup>26</sup> This is the ultimate fulfillment of our lives. "There is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace, and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him."<sup>27</sup> This connection is not only spiritual fulfillment but brings union to our whole person. "The soul rest that Jesus offers touches the whole of our being – physical, spiritual, and psychological – but is particularly focused on our inner self."<sup>28</sup> Soul rest is available to everyone who pursues Jesus and it alone brings a comprehensive effect.

### Wholeness and the Indwelling God

There is an essential connection to be made between our wholeness and the awareness of the indwelling God. Thomas Kelly writes,

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto itself. Yielding to these persuasions, gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely, to the Light Within, is the beginning of true life.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Keating, *Invitation to Love*, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York, NY: New Directions, 2003), 36.

<sup>28</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1993), 3.

“It is to this presence of God in the depths of our being that we must be attentive, for it is here where loving union with God is engendered.”<sup>30</sup> The awareness of the indwelling God is a top priority for our lives. “Our greatest need then is to return to the deep center of our being, where God’s very self is present to us in cruciform love as our true being.”<sup>31</sup> So it should be understood that, “To come to Jesus is to come to wholeness, to the very center of ourselves, where Life and Light reside.”<sup>32</sup> That this place where God meets us is within as Theophan the Recluse states, “To pray is to descend with the mind into the heart, and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all-seeing, within you.”<sup>33</sup> Henri Nouwen writes, “The most profound insight of the Desert Fathers is that entering into the heart is entering into the kingdom of God. In other words, the way to God is through the heart.”<sup>34</sup> This journey inward is difficult, but we must trust that God meets us in this process. “We’re asked to let go, to surrender, to trust the process, to trust that the deepest desire of our heart is God-desire. And in trusting, we are honoring something deeper within us, our deepest selves, where God dwells.”<sup>35</sup> God dwells within and this is the foundation to embracing the shalom-oriented life.

Meeting the God who is within connects us to the divine light. “He who is within us urges, by secret persuasion, to such an amazing Inward Life with Him, so that, firmly

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<sup>30</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 144.

<sup>31</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 145.

<sup>32</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 192.

<sup>33</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York, NY: Ballentine Books, 2003), 73.

<sup>34</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 75.

<sup>35</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 140.

cleaving to Him, we always look out upon all the world through the sheen of the Inward Light, and react toward men spontaneously and joyously from this Inward Center.”<sup>36</sup> He is the only place of satisfaction we are all looking for: “Wholeness dwells in human beings by the Spirit of God, whose divine life pulsates within those who drink at the Well.”<sup>37</sup> It is recognizing that all one’s life is tethered to this God. “His Holy Spirit pervades every atom in your body, to the very marrow of your bones. Whatever blood flows through your veins, flows by its power. . . . All your feelings and thoughts, whatever they may be, come from that invisible source.”<sup>38</sup> It is this dwelling where God meets us, and our entire being experiences wholeness. “Remarkably, the intimacy that God offers me is not limited to him hosting me. He also longs for me to host him. . . . If I am to have a place of stillness at the core of my being, it will only be because I have learned to offer hospitality to the Spirit.”<sup>39</sup> The shalom-oriented life is directly connected to our receptivity and the space we create for God.

### **Wholeness and the Implications of Shalom for Life**

The more we are connected to God, the more we will bring his wholeness to our world. “Union with God results in our being a person through whom God’s presence touches the world with forgiving, cleansing, healing, liberating, and transforming

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<sup>36</sup> Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 118.

<sup>38</sup> De Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, 72.

<sup>39</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 47.

grace.”<sup>40</sup> Our wholeness has a direct effect on our environment. “Not only are we created to find our wholeness in a life of loving union with God, but in that union we are to be persons in whom God’s love, mercy, and grace touch the lives of others.”<sup>41</sup> Rohr explains the implications of wholeness from a psychological perspective: “Whole people see and create wholeness wherever they go; split people see and create splits in everything and everybody.”<sup>42</sup> This is why it is imperative for us to be attentive to our union. “Our greatest contribution to peace in the world consists of getting back and reestablishing our inner peace.”<sup>43</sup> When God transforms the inner world, the effects are seen far beyond the life of that individual.

One of the implications and by-products of wholeness is that God holds our lives together with integrity between the inner world and the outer world. “Wholeness is a state in which there is a total harmony in your being. . . . There exists a balance between what you think and what you feel; there is integrity between thought, word and action. This is the state of wholeness where there is coherence in your life.”<sup>44</sup> It is a way of engagement with the world where we overcome obstacles in the inner life that once held us back. “Living without fears and living with wholeness increases our quality of life and makes

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<sup>40</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 151.

<sup>43</sup> Miriam Subirana, *Dare to Live: Reflections on Fear, Courage and Wholeness* (Winchester, UK: O Books, 2008), 118.

<sup>44</sup> Subirana, *Dare to Live*, 107.

us happier. . . . To live in wholeness is to be in a state in which the self shines.”<sup>45</sup> This means all of life can be touched by God’s shalom. “Divine love can now manifest itself in all our activities, even the most ordinary. The same all-pervasive union is present while walking down the street or brushing one’s teeth as in periods of contemplative prayer.”<sup>46</sup> God can transform every area of life no matter how mundane and ordinary it feels to us.

Our ability to follow Jesus in his life of service for the world becomes a defining mark of Christians with wholeness. “God’s cruciform love for us and our response of self-abandoning love for God, thrusts us into our world to be the incarnation of love for others.”<sup>47</sup> The character of Jesus is the great vision for the church. Our ability to take on this character is directly connected to our shalom. Keating writes, “The clarity with which we see other people’s needs and respond to them is in direct proportion to our interior freedom.”<sup>48</sup> The kingdom of God is a direct picture of this kind of life: Our inner wholeness and the correlation to the needs of others.

### Wholeness and Indifference

Indifference can be misunderstood, but it is a place of receiving interior freedom. “In the context of spiritual discernment, indifference is a positive term signifying that ‘I am indifferent to anything but God’s will.’ This is ‘interior freedom’ or a state of

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<sup>45</sup> Subirana, *Dare to Live*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Keating, *Invitation to Love*, 118.

<sup>47</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 138.

<sup>48</sup> Keating, *Invitation to Love*, 30.

openness to God in which we are free from undue attachment to any particular outcome.”<sup>49</sup> The way by which God moves us toward wholeness comes through the process of indifference. It is “Self-surrender, trust and faith, the universal means of accepting the state chosen by God’s grace for each one.”<sup>50</sup> We are aware that this moment is where God is regardless of our circumstances. “In this prayer [of indifference] we ask God to work in our hearts to make us indifferent to anything but the will of God.”<sup>51</sup> It is a surrender to love, “But surrender to God’s love is surrender to his will.”<sup>52</sup> We relinquish our expectations and our need to be in control trusting divine love above all things.

This indifference can come to any circumstance we face as long as we open our hands to God’s will. “To let the peace of Christ rule is to view every circumstance through the kingdom perspectives of love and justice, and to engage every circumstance with mercy and compassion.”<sup>53</sup> It means viewing all situations with the mind of Christ and not the self. “The Fathers of the Desert had a word for this experience. They called it ‘apatheia,’ which is sometimes taken to mean ‘indifference.’ It is rather a tremendous concern for everything that is, but without the emotional involvement characteristic of the

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<sup>49</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 63.

<sup>50</sup> De Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 96.

<sup>53</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 156.

false self.”<sup>54</sup> Jesus’ life was marked by this indifference. “In the lonely place Jesus finds the courage to follow God’s will and not his own; to speak God’s words and not his own; to do God’s work and not his own.”<sup>55</sup> Therefore, “When we walk with God, his will directs us and must replace every other guidance.”<sup>56</sup> God’s voice becomes primary. We let go of our voice and other voices that try to direct us on the best path forward.

### Wholeness and Restoring what was Lost

Through union with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we receive the glory that was lost. Mulholland states, “All this suggests that when Jesus says that he has given to us the ‘glory’ that God has given to him, he is indicating that he has made it possible for us to once again be formed in the image of God, to share God’s nature as we were intended.”<sup>57</sup> This is why we were created – to experience God to the fullest: “Your deepest longing is not a longing for [things]. These are all valid and significant longings. But they are only echoes of the lasting satisfaction for which you’ve been created.”<sup>58</sup> The greatest desire of our souls has always been union with God.

The Triune God is in our midst and is redeeming the chaos of our souls: “We believe God’s Spirit continues to hover over the chaos of the world’s evil and our sin, shaping a new creation and new creatures. . . . We believe that everything, especially

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<sup>54</sup> Keating, *Invitation to Love*, 117.

<sup>55</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation* (New York: Harper One, 2010), 20.

<sup>56</sup> De Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 127.

everything that looks like wreckage, is material that God is using to make a praising life.”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, God’s in-breaking and stilling the chaos means that we can have hope and it is cosmic. But sadly, “This is much of our problem today; we have not given the world any message of cosmic hope but only threatening messages of Apocalypse and Armageddon.”<sup>60</sup> We are called to extend an invitation to this wholeness for all. “We’re called to wake up to the ways in which we hide and avoid just like Adam and Eve. We’re called to wake up to God’s shalom life in our souls and in our world, and to extend the wake-up call to all.”<sup>61</sup> This wake-up call is the invitation of God that has extended to all creation since the beginning of time.

### Kingdom and Wholeness

To see the kingdom of God is to see God’s reign of wholeness breaking into our world. It is about finding life now. Willard states, “The really good news for humanity is that Jesus is now taking students in the master class of life. The eternal life that begins with confidence in Jesus is a life in his present kingdom. . . . So the message of and about [Jesus] is specifically a gospel for our life now, not just for dying.”<sup>62</sup> This means that every area of our life is part of this kingdom. “God does this [wholeness] work in us and through us when we’re on the subway and in our cars, when we’re having dinner and

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<sup>59</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 23.

<sup>60</sup> Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 81.

<sup>61</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 191.

<sup>62</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1998), XVII.

when we're sleeping. We need not become monks. We need only find our Center, our Inner Light, and remain connected to it.”<sup>63</sup> This means this kingdom and this experience can be found no matter the circumstances. Mulholland writes, “What Paul [the apostle] had discovered was that his life was immersed in blessing. . . . Paul discovered that there is another order of being, there is another structure of life in which life, even life in a Roman dungeon, is immersed in blessing.”<sup>64</sup> This kingdom is brought about by disciples of Jesus following him to establish the kingdom more fully. “Our job is not to bring God to the world. That has already happened. That is the good news of creation and the incarnation. Our job is to follow the Spirit into the world and be part of what God is doing there to establish [His] kingdom.”<sup>65</sup> The kingdom of God becomes the primary realm where the shalom-oriented life can be found.

### Holiness and Wholeness

Holiness and wholeness are so important to each other because it reminds us that God is about the redemption of the whole person. “The goal of the Christian spiritual journey as becoming whole and holy is that it reminds us that the focus of God’s love and salvation is not some part of us but our whole person. . . . Jesus did not die so that some

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<sup>63</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 188.

<sup>64</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 71.

<sup>65</sup> David G. Benner, *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 157.

part of me would be saved; he died so that in my whole being I would be made anew.”<sup>66</sup>

It is about embracing a unitive life where wholeness and holiness are wed to one another.

DeGroat writes,

Purity, or *katharoi* in Greek, is about a state of being, about a fundamental undividedness or wholeness that marks the life of *shalom*. . . . Purity is about being put together again, being made whole, so that our inner life matches our outer life. . . . It’s not about some exhausting holiness project; it’s about letting God do the purifying work through our brokenness, mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst, mercy and more.<sup>67</sup>

Holiness is not an exhausting project of tasks but rather the work to bring about wholeness to the entirety of the individual.

Holiness is not something based in religiosity but in union with God. “Holiness is not some regimen of abstinence or a life of rigorous religiosity. . . . Holiness is life in loving union with God. Such a life is our wholeness, our maturity, our fullness, that for which we were created.”<sup>68</sup> DeGroat writes, “Becoming whole isn’t about applying a cosmetic strategy. It isn’t about beefing up our holiness credentials. We do literally fall into wholeness and holiness when every aid we’ve used to hold ourselves up is knocked out from under us.”<sup>69</sup> God’s work begins when there is no ego left to cling to for identity. “Christian maturity is not a matter of doing more for God; it is God doing more in and through us. Immaturity is noisy with anxiety-fueled self-importance. Maturity is quietly

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<sup>66</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 35.

<sup>67</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 96

<sup>68</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 120.

<sup>69</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 98.

content to pursue a life of obedient humility.”<sup>70</sup> Self-forgetfulness becomes a primary marker for a life with God.

There is something about our descent into holiness and wholeness we must embrace. Holiness is cast in a very different light at the outset of the Beatitudes because holiness and wholeness are about embracing brokenness as an essential part of life.<sup>71</sup> We fall into wholeness rather than conquering it. “What if holiness was more like the elusive wholeness that we’ve been considering? What if spiritual maturation was not so much about ascent but about descent – about falling into wholeness? What if purity was about union not separation?”<sup>72</sup> Life is better described by what we are connected to than what we stand against. It is about relinquishing control rather than gaining control.

### With-God Life

At the core of reality, “God’s desire for us is that we should live in him.”<sup>73</sup> “In essence, [life] is being with God. It is experiential knowing of our being in God. It is resting in the presence of the One whose word and presence have invited us into being and into relationship with the ground of our being.”<sup>74</sup> This “experiential knowing” is what eternal life is about. “Eternal life is life in God. It is our ever-deepening conversational relationship with the One who has proven his love for us beyond

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<sup>70</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Practice Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 222.

<sup>71</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 94.

<sup>72</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 88.

<sup>73</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Benner, *Opening to God*, 129.

imagination. Eternal life is eternal life, eternal living. Eternal life is living with Father, Son, and Spirit forever.”<sup>75</sup> It is participation in the Triune God.

The eternal life of the kingdom is found now in union with God who is always there. “Do we slow down enough in our desire to carry out what Jesus calls us to do to remember that he is with us as we do it? We are never alone, we are never abandoned.”<sup>76</sup> This means the with-God life is always here in this moment despite the circumstances. “So the challenge today is to find wholeness right where we are – in the world, amid broken and divided souls like us, and in imperfect churches with imperfect pastors and imperfect singing and imperfect community.”<sup>77</sup> “The right question, according to Jesus was, What is God doing in this situation, and how can I get on board with it?”<sup>78</sup> This means, “When we experience loss that seems to diminish who we are, we need more than ever to remain deeply connected to God through Christ.”<sup>79</sup> It is this relationship that gives life to us and transforms us.

### Wholeness and Rest

Wholeness and rest have a deep connection with one another. The reality is our lives must find a new rhythm and pace. Alan Fadling writes, “We [must] consider

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<sup>75</sup> Alan Fadling, *An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus’ Rhythms of Work and Rest* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 181.

<sup>76</sup> Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 34.

<sup>77</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 186.

<sup>78</sup> Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 140.

stepping off the treadmill or out of the fast lane long enough to relax and linger in God's presence, to walk with him at his pace. . . . Jesus himself knew how to get out of the fray so he could linger with the Father."<sup>80</sup> Our lives were meant to model the rhythms that God established from the very beginning. Peterson writes, "The Hebrew evening/morning sequence conditions us to the rhythms of grace. We go to sleep, and God begins his work. . . . Grace is primary. We wake into a world that we didn't make, into a salvation we didn't earn."<sup>81</sup>

In a culture of productivity and efficiency, we need to be reminded that, "In trying to dedicate every moment to God, just remember that the time of waiting, doing nothing as the world would say, is just as much an offering to God as hours of prayer or work."<sup>82</sup> We long to feel useful but wholeness is available in the present. Subirana states, "What we want is to fill inner emptiness that sometimes invades us, and to feel ourselves full and useful, and to shine with all our strengths. . . . Wholeness is not a 'final' state but rather we can feel it in the here and now."<sup>83</sup> Finding this rest in the present makes me available to lead others to it because, "When I have begun to be a person with a quiet, still center, I can invite others to come and rest there."<sup>84</sup> As Fadling states, "Peace is the

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<sup>80</sup> Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 40.

<sup>81</sup> Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 68.

<sup>82</sup> Shirley Carter Hughson, *The Spiritual Letters of Shirley Carter Hughson* (West Park, NY: Holy Cross Press, 1953), 34.

<sup>83</sup> Subirana, *Dare to Live*, 130.

<sup>84</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 46.

fruit of unhurriedness.”<sup>85</sup> It is a life of hope humanity is longing for. “Holy unhurry flourishes in a heart full of hope. Its opposite – hopelessness – can cause us to be driven, anxious and frantic. When we wait on God, our vision of his reliability and immense care for us is sharpened.”<sup>86</sup> God is faithful to provide the care everyone is looking for in himself.

Rest is not only available for us spiritually, but it is meant to bless the whole person. “The soul rest that Jesus offers touches the whole of our being – physical, spiritual, and psychological – but is particularly focused on our inner self.”<sup>87</sup> It is opening all of ourselves up to God who embraces us. Keating writes, “Through the process of resting in God, beyond thoughts, feelings, associations, and commentaries, we are moving...and opening to the divine presence at a deeper level still. This brings even greater rest.”<sup>88</sup> There are always greater levels of rest for us to experience in God.

### **Spiritual Practices and Benefits**

Spiritual practices have been written on extensively as an appropriate vehicle for developing the shalom-oriented life. We are well aware that there are many practices that are available for spiritual formation. Moreover, there are many different spiritual

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<sup>85</sup> Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 43.

<sup>86</sup> Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 69.

<sup>87</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 15.

<sup>88</sup> Keating, *Invitation to Love*, 99.

practices that can be used that involve scripture, prayer, and reflection.<sup>89</sup> Each of these major categories of spiritual formation (scripture, prayer, and reflection) could have a whole chapter devoted to them. However, this section will concentrate on the relevant practices related to the topic.

The goal of this paper is to investigate the warrant of the lectio divina practice and its implications for the shalom-oriented life. Because of this goal, this section on spiritual practices and benefits will focus directly on the relevant literature in the areas of the contemplative life, silence and solitude, and lectio divina. All of these practices have the most direct connection to the purpose of this paper and it is for this reason they will be discussed.

This section will explain how others have incorporated these practices and the resulting benefits. The reality is, “Those engaged regularly in spiritual practices can’t help but bring a transforming presence into [their lives]. They are not fully transformed and definitely not perfect, but always ‘on the way.’”<sup>90</sup> We recognize the slow work of God in our lives is his normal work that brings lasting change.

### Contemplative Life

The contemplative life is the life God has called us to live. It is recognizing God’s nearness in all things. “Everything begins to speak to us of God. Happiness arises from the perception of God’s closeness and our sense of belonging to the universe. The feeling

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<sup>89</sup> See Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005) as a comprehensive resource on the many spiritual practices available to us.

<sup>90</sup> Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together*, 114.

of closeness may be manifested in spiritual experiences such as the stages of contemplation.”<sup>91</sup> There is an attentiveness that is needed. “The attentive life [is] the *contemplative* life, for contemplative literally means ‘putting together.’ We connect the dots between the *chronos* and the *kairos* of our life, relate the hours that we measure by the clock to the hours and seasons of our soul.”<sup>92</sup> This life is not a life of forsaking desire. Rather it is implementing spiritual practices to develop our great desire for God and relinquish the smaller desires. “The contemplative life doesn’t demand that we abandon everything we’ve loved or attained..., [rather] what we relinquish is the need to possess. Our desire, which has become addicted to possession, must learn dispossession. This is the only way that our big-D Desire can be freed.”<sup>93</sup> It is in our descent that shalom is revealed. “The journey is from a place of exhaustion to a place of rest, from a place of fragmentation to a place of wholeness. . . . This journey [is] the contemplative descent..., a descent into wholeness.”<sup>94</sup> God accomplishes his greatest work in our lives through the humility of wholeness.

The goal is to move beyond mere knowledge of God to embrace our acceptance with the Triune God. “The deepening intimacy with God...is achieved through love, not simply knowledge.”<sup>95</sup> The contemplative life is found in “stilling ourselves before God, moving ever deeper into the core of our being and simply offering ourselves to God in

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<sup>91</sup> Keating, *Invitation to Love*, 129.

<sup>92</sup> Ford, *The Attentive Life*, 23.

<sup>93</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 137

<sup>94</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 134.

<sup>95</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 29.

totally vulnerable love.”<sup>96</sup> It is vulnerable love that transforms our whole being. “[The contemplative life] invites us to attend to the disparate part of ourselves and surrender each to God’s loving embrace, which frees us to enjoy sweet communion with God.”<sup>97</sup> The loving embrace of God is the balm of our souls.

### Silence and Solitude

One of the spiritual practices that brings great benefits is silence and solitude. It is in this silence that “we discover that God is the silence. Inner silence is not a space where God comes to meet us. When we are still, we know God as God (Psalm 46:10). We begin to discover that at the core of our being God is, and that God is our true life.”<sup>98</sup>

Silence and solitude are the place of deep spiritual salvation. It is where the voices that speak over us become a false narrative that are quieted by the voice of God. “[Solitude] enables us to withdraw not only from the noise and distraction of the external world, but also the ‘noise’ of the inner compulsions that drive us. In solitude and silence, we become quiet enough to hear a voice that is not our own.”<sup>99</sup> “Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self.”<sup>100</sup> Solitude “is the place of conversion, the

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<sup>96</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 97.

<sup>97</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 174.

<sup>98</sup> Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 161.

<sup>99</sup> Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together*, 39.

<sup>100</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 15.

place where the old self dies and the new self is born, the place where the emergence of the new man and the new woman occurs.”<sup>101</sup> “Solitude is thus the place of purification and transformation, the place of the great struggle and the great encounter. . . . It is the place where Christ remodels us in his own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world. Solitude is the place of our salvation.”<sup>102</sup> The busyness of our lives keeps us from embracing the place where God meets us and transforms us. “We flee from the silence because we are fleeing from aloneness. It is in solitude where you can really see yourself, become aware, reflect and transform.”<sup>103</sup> Solitude is where God meets us with transforming power.

### Lectio Divina

The spiritual practice of lectio divina is a major emphasis of this thesis-project. It is in this practice that we discover true benefits and transformation. “As we cease striving in times of solitude, we realize that there is a difference between reading the Scriptures for utilitarian purposes – such as gaining information, preparing a sermon, or proving a point – and engaging the Scriptures for spiritual transformation.”<sup>104</sup> Lectio divina takes the participant through the progression of the senses to receive the embrace of God. “The progression from lectio to meditatio to oratio to contemplatio is one from sense, to

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<sup>101</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 17.

<sup>102</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 22.

<sup>103</sup> Subirana, *Dare to Live*, 167.

<sup>104</sup> Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together*, 40.

intellect, to affect, and then to the capturing of all those powers by God in something that transcends them. The first three steps require arduous effort, the last is effortless.”<sup>105</sup> “In the early stages we hear and dialogue with God’s word in Scripture. . . . During contemplation we become the receiver, with God, so to speak, acting within and upon us. . . . Contemplation is a gaze of love.”<sup>106</sup> This gaze of love is the goal of contemplation.

Lectio is less about reading scripture and more about listening to it. “[Lectio divina] is not so much a way of reading as a way of listening. . . . It is listening for the voice of God, communicated through Scriptures and revealed by the Spirit. It is, therefore, because it is an opening of self to God.”<sup>107</sup> Benner writes, “The listening to Scripture that is at the core of the lectio divina is a listening in silence and stillness that seeks to encounter God as he speaks directly and personally to you.”<sup>108</sup> We recognize that God meets us in the moment. It is a spiritual practice where we are aware that God knows us personally.

## Neuroscience

The goal of this paper is to test whether a continual practice of lectio divina can produce a more shalom-oriented life for the Christian. A large portion of this chapter is designated to neuroscience because the comprehensive research in this field has only

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<sup>105</sup> Tim Gray, *Praying Scripture for a Change* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009), 91.

<sup>106</sup> Gray, *Praying Scripture for a Change*, 96.

<sup>107</sup> Benner, *Opening to God*, 48.

<sup>108</sup> Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 169.

further validated the importance of meditation and other practices. The study of neuroscience has provided justification for this thesis-project as a worthwhile endeavor.

The field of neuroscience has made incredible advances in research in the last few decades. Some of the findings have only furthered our understanding of the power of habits and the ability of the brain to make changes over time. The data has shown that the brain can be affected positively and negatively by the choices we make, and the evidence has shown how the brain becomes healthier through spiritual practices.

### Neural Pathways

One of the big discoveries in recent neuroscience is the power of habit and its effects on our neural pathways. The reality is that our decisions are rarely free. “What we now know about the human brain is this: our choices, though seemingly free, are locked into patterns established early in childhood and grooved into our brains. . . . [These] patterns of thinking, living, and relating take years to form and years to be freed from.”<sup>109</sup> These patterns are determined by the stories that we tell both positively and negatively. They develop the ways we will approach similar situations in the future. Lisa Wimberger writes,

The stories one creates subconsciously and consciously actually create a physical reaction in the brain. When we imbue those stories with details and emotional content, they become marked in our brains by dedicated neural pathways and networks. The more we tell these stories, the more embedded the networks become as they repeatedly engage. It’s like digging a groove slowly over time, and before you know it your wheels are locked into a deep groove directing your

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<sup>109</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 37.

path. The deeper those grooves are, the less effort it takes to engage that pathway and the more energy-efficient that particular reaction becomes.<sup>110</sup>

This makes it extremely important for us to assess the stories we tell ourselves and the impact they have on our lives. The evidence shows that “sustained stress actually causes free-radical damage. . . . We get stuck in stress cycles based on our stories and we damage ourselves enough to lock us into imbalance, depression, and disease, flailing in the dark for a shutoff valve we’ve destroyed.”<sup>111</sup> This means that if an individual has a fear-orientation, they are neurologically hard-wired to continue in the same course of action. Moreover, “this cycle [of fear] is detrimental and downright vicious. The more we’re in fear due to our experiences of the past or an expectation of the future, the more we reinforce negative neural pathways and stifle our own ability to find a way back to joy. It’s a no-win situation.”<sup>112</sup> Breaking these vicious cycles will, in the short run, cause anxiety in the brain because of the disruption to old habits. Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman in their book *How God Changes Your Brain* write,

It took your brain decades to form these habits, and it’s not easy to turn them off. Old neural circuits do not disappear, especially if they are tinged with negative or stressful memories. In fact, it takes a lot of metabolic energy to grow new dendrites and axons or rearrange synaptic connections that have been firmly established over the years. Furthermore, any disruption in old neural patterns creates a certain degree of anxiety in the brain. That old limbic system, which is largely responsible for maintaining synaptic stability, is not as flexible as the creative frontal lobes. Thus it’s easy to dream up a new idea, but exceedingly difficult to get the rest of the brain to comply.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Lisa Wimberger, *New Beliefs, New Brain* (Studio City, CA: Divine Arts, 2012), 33-34.

<sup>111</sup> Wimberger, *New Beliefs, New Brain*, 29.

<sup>112</sup> Wimberger, *New Beliefs, New Brain*, 36.

<sup>113</sup> Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009), 175.

In the brain, ideas are not separated between fact and fantasy. Put simply, the best stories win.<sup>114</sup> The fear-oriented areas of the brain are sadly better at telling stories. Wimberger writes, “The brain is a master storyteller, weaving fact and fantasy into every moment. The limbic brain believes all of the stories and is particularly good at activating the traumatic ones. It then uses them as a justification to spur its armies into action, even when new situations only slightly resemble the old traumatic ones.”<sup>115</sup> Newberg and Waldman write, “The human brain seems to have difficulty separating fantasies from facts. It sees things that are not there, and it sometimes doesn’t see things that are there. In fact, the brain doesn’t even try to create a fully detailed map of the external world. Instead, it selects a handful of cues, then fills in the rest with conjecture, fantasy, and belief.”<sup>116</sup> The stories we tell ourselves fill in the gaps when the brain selects only a handful of cues.

The neural pathways created are extremely important for how events will be interpreted by our brains. It is imperative to develop healthy neural connections. Developing positive habits in our lives, like spiritual practices, will enable us to have healthier brain function over time. This leads to the next discussion and breakthrough in neuroscience that has shaped the importance of habits and what they mean for the brain: neuroplasticity.

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<sup>114</sup> Annette Simmons, *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins* (New York: Amacom, 2007).

<sup>115</sup> Wimberger, *New Beliefs, New Brain*, 30.

<sup>116</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 5.

## Neuroplasticity

The latest evidence in neuroscience is that the brain has the ability to change over time. Newberg and Waldman write, “The underlying mechanism that allows these [positive] changes to occur relates to a unique quality known as neuroplasticity: the ability of the human brain to structurally rearrange itself in response to a wide variety of positive and negative events.”<sup>117</sup> Dr. Greg Thompson agrees: “The brain [has] a great deal of plasticity. This refers to its [ability]...to make synapses and to prune away those synapses that don’t get much firing action. In both infancy and adolescence, neural networks are forming and re-forming almost daily.”<sup>118</sup>

This information differs from the view of the brain that existed for centuries up into the mid-twentieth century. “Up until the early half of the last century, science and the medical field supported the idea that once a part of the brain was damaged, the abilities it controlled were lost forever. . . . It has since been proven that the brain has vast abilities to regenerate, reallocate, and rewire.”<sup>119</sup> Studies were conducted to show the brain’s remarkable ability to grow and adapt. “In 2000, Karl Herholz and Wolf-Dieter Heiss discovered that stroke patients who merely imagined moving an affected limb actually activated the corresponding motor circuits in their brains. . . . The thoughts we think actually reshape our brains!”<sup>120</sup> This makes humans different from other animals and our

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<sup>117</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 14.

<sup>118</sup> Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul* (Carrollton, TX: Tyndale Momentum, 2010), 45.

<sup>119</sup> Wimberger, *New Beliefs, New Brain*, 33.

<sup>120</sup> Timothy R. Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 64.

ability to change our response to the environment around us. Newberg and Waldman comment, “What makes human beings unique is...neuroplasticity. Neurons do not have fixed properties. Instead, they are changing all the time. . . . In essence, evolution gave us a nervous system that actively participates in its own neural construction, something we do not see in other animal brains.”<sup>121</sup> Humans have the potential and capacity to participate in their own neural development!

This evidence gives huge support to the importance of developing positive habits that create a shalom-oriented life. “Not only does the brain rewire itself, it also births new brain cells. . . . The bottom line is that the brain is not set in stone. We are not dealt an unchangeable hand.”<sup>122</sup> There is great hope because “self-awareness or mindfulness is the first step toward change, toward wholeness. Our brains are malleable, capable of adjusting to new realities.”<sup>123</sup> Though our brains will always deal with fear-orientation and the power of the limbic brain to process information, neuroplasticity gives warrant to overcoming fear. “We can’t rid our old limbic [system], which means that anger and fear will always be part of our neural and spiritual personality. However, we can train the newer structures in our brain to suppress our biological tendency to react with anger and fear.”<sup>124</sup> Neuroscience shows that positive habits will have a lasting effect on the brain

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<sup>121</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 104.

<sup>122</sup> Wimberger, *New Beliefs, New Brain*, 34.

<sup>123</sup> DeGroat, *Wholeheartedness*, 64.

<sup>124</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 123.

because of the brain's ability to adapt. This plasticity makes it extremely important that we develop positive rather than negative habits.

### Meditation and the Brain

With the research findings on the importance of habits and the role they play in developing neural pathways and the data on neuroplasticity, the question then becomes: What research has been found that brought about positive changes in the brain? The common answer through the data is mindfulness practices and meditation. "Neuroscience research confirms that mindful meditative exercises that stretch and challenge the attention mechanism of your brain enhance the integration of the prefrontal cortex."<sup>125</sup> "The brain has a hundred billion neurons that connect to others in trillions upon trillions of ways...[and] the slowly accumulating evidence points to the very real possibility that meditation is an excellent exercise for maintaining a healthy brain."<sup>126</sup> Meditation has a profound effect on the health of the brain.

Neuroscience studies revealed that meditation practices have impacted stress levels. "Brain-imaging studies have demonstrated that the more time a person spends in communion with the God of love, the more developed the anterior cingulate cortex becomes. Not only that, the person experiences a decrease in stress hormones, blood pressure, heart rate and risk of untimely death."<sup>127</sup> Newberg and Waldman write, "Mild,

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<sup>125</sup> Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 172.

<sup>126</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 26.

<sup>127</sup> Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain*, 42.

short-term, or chronic stress impairs memory by disrupting dendritic activity [in the brain]. . . . Meditation will help maintain dendrite function: It lowers the overall levels of stress while simultaneously stimulating cognitive alertness.”<sup>128</sup>

The effects on your brain over time by stress can bring long-term issues but meditation has been found to control negative emotions and thoughts. “The neural circuits activated by meditation buffer you from the deleterious effects of aging and stress and give you better control over your emotions.”<sup>129</sup> What happens in the brain is that the blood flow is primarily concentrated in lower regions of the limbic brain for those with a fear orientation. Wimberger writes, “Meditation directly affects limbic brain activity, which keeps us in our negative stories. Regular meditation measurably decreases blood flow to the limbic brain and increases it in the prefrontal cortex. Those who meditate show different mapping on brain scans than those who don’t meditate.”<sup>130</sup> Meditation allows the blood flow to reach the areas of the brain that control compassion and rational thought. “When you intensely and consistently focus on your spiritual values and goals, you increase the blood flow to your frontal lobes and anterior cingulate [in your brain], which causes the activity in emotional centers of the brain to decrease.”<sup>131</sup>

“Mindfulness exercises have been shown to activate an alpha brainwave pattern, creating a ripe environment for relaxation and intuitive insight. They offer the prefrontal

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<sup>128</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 36.

<sup>129</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 149.

<sup>130</sup> Wimberger, *New Beliefs, New Brain*, 69.

<sup>131</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 20.

cortex increased blood flow, neural stimulation, and neurotransmitter flow.”<sup>132</sup> Brain scans revealed that meditation brought “a significant increase of neural activity in the prefrontal cortex. . . . The anterior cingulate was also activated...[which] plays a major role in lowering anxiety and irritability, and also enhances social awareness.”<sup>133</sup>

“Our brain-scan study showed that meditation...strengthens a specific circuit [in the brain]. . . . This circuit governs a wide variety of activities involved with consciousness, clarity of mind, reality formation, error detection, empathy, compassion, emotional balance, and the suppression of anger and fear.”<sup>134</sup>

The evidence has also revealed that the time spent in meditation plays an important role in the long-term health of the brain. The evidence suggests that not all prayer habits are created equal. “Brief prayer...has not yet been shown to have a direct effect upon cognition. . . . However, when prayer is incorporated into longer forms of intense meditation..., many health benefits are found.”<sup>135</sup> There is a connection between time and the overall effects. “Neurologically...the longer one prays or meditates, the more changes occur in the brain. Five minutes of prayer once a week may have little effect, but forty minutes of daily practice, over a period of years, will bring permanent changes to the brain.”<sup>136</sup> “If you analyze the data collected from meditation studies, one of the most influential factors is time. . . . [Studies] have found small but significant changes in brain

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<sup>132</sup> Wimberger, *New Beliefs, New Brain*, 39.

<sup>133</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 27.

<sup>134</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 28.

<sup>135</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 28.

<sup>136</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 48.

activity after only eight weeks of daily practice.”<sup>137</sup> “Brain research shows that fifteen minutes a day in meditation or thoughtful communion with the God of love results in measurable development” of the brain, and the more development, “the less fear and anxiety we experience.”<sup>138</sup>

The connection between time and the effects in the brain show the formation of new activity based on the practice. Newberg and Waldman write, “If you contemplate God long enough, something surprising happens in the brain. Neural functioning begins to change. Different circuits become activated, while others become deactivated. New dendrites formed, new synaptic connections are made, and the brain becomes more sensitive to subtle realms of experience.”<sup>139</sup> “Meditating regularly enhances BDNF (Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor) production and creates a brain that is not only more resistant to deterioration but one that enables you to push the limits of day-to-day functionality.”<sup>140</sup> The effectiveness of meditation is directly connected to its continual and regular practice.

## Conclusion

The evidence from the relevant literature suggests that the effects of fear orientation plague us all to varying degrees. Neuroscience has only supported the effects

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<sup>137</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 62.

<sup>138</sup> Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain*, 132.

<sup>139</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 3.

<sup>140</sup> David Perlmutter and Alberto Villoldo, *Power Up Your Brain: The Neuroscience of Enlightenment* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House Inc., 2011), 92.

of this habitual issue. However, the great news is that new habits can be formed! Studies in spiritual practices have revealed from quantitative and qualitative data points that anyone can cultivate a shalom-oriented life. The overwhelming evidence from the relevant literature of the importance of wholeness, spiritual practices, and the implications of the neurological outcomes makes this thesis-project a worthwhile endeavor. The next chapter discusses the findings of empirical research on the relationship between lectio divina and the shalom-oriented life among the members of Ward Church.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LECTIO DIVINA PROJECT AND RESULTS AT WARD CHURCH

The goal of this project was to explore how the spiritual practice of lectio divina can move a Christian from a more fear-oriented life to a more shalom-oriented life. From the information already explored in previous chapters, this subject has warrant to be a worthwhile project. The information will be broken down into two main sections of qualitative data found in the lectio divina workbooks and quantitative data found in the pre-test and post-test scores of the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test.

#### **Lectio Divina and Project Methodology**

Thirty-one members of Ward Church agreed to take part in this project. They were asked to complete a pre-test of the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test. This test is a 15-question online test that operates on a 0-60 scale.<sup>1</sup> This test was used to study the level of fear orientation that existed in each participant and how fear, worry, and anxiety inform their daily actions. In June 2017 and July 2017, several workshops were held with the participants to walk them through the lectio divina process. The goal was to make sure the participants had an adequate grasp of what the lectio divina practice entailed and how to adequately complete the assignments. Participants were encouraged to write as much as possible in their lectio divina journals and to be as honest as possible because no one outside of myself would actually know their identity. Throughout the project, each

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<sup>1</sup> “Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test,” <http://psymed.info/generalized-anxiety-disorder-test>, Psymed, accessed December 18, 2017. See also Appendix A.

person was only known by his or her participant number. This participant number was marked in the upper right corner of their lectio divina workbook.

The Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test had to be taken within certain dates. The test was taken between July 25, 2017 and July 31, 2017. The goal of limiting the time frame for the pre-test was to make sure the results recorded were an accurate depiction of the participant going into the 30-day lectio divina exercise. The Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test became the chosen tool over a survey or questionnaire to remove as much subjectivity as possible and to provide a consistent data point for testing. Using an independent psychological test that had been vetted helped provide an objective examination for the participants.

Beginning August 1, 2017 through August 30, 2017, the 31 members who had taken their Generalized Anxiety Disorder Pre-test received their lectio divina project workbook to be completed every day through the month.<sup>2</sup> The lectio divina project included one scripture passage that would be used for each day during the month. The participants were asked to set aside 15 minutes per day to complete the exercise daily. One important part of this 15-minute time limit was that the first 2 minutes were devoted to silence. It was important for the project that the participants were present as much as possible to hear from God. The participants understood that 15 minutes was all that was asked of them but if they decided to go more than 15 minutes that was fine.

The goal was to manage two points of tension for this project: the project could not be too short and it could not too long. On one side were the findings from

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B for the complete Lectio Divina Project used by each participant.

neuroscience and that brief prayer exercises rarely had much positive effect on the brain over time.<sup>3</sup> Practices need to last a certain amount of time to create positive brain effects. For instance, scientific tests were done that followed one case study where a consistent meditation practice lasted 12 minutes. The data found from this study was that this type of practice provided profound positive effects on the brain when comparing the pre and post brain scans.<sup>4</sup> On the other side, the tension that needed to be managed was a lectio divina exercise that could not take up considerable amounts of time. The participants taking part in this exercise were all volunteers so there was not much incentivizing. This meant more obstacles in the way for the participants and a higher likelihood they could drop out. A 15-minute lectio divina exercise felt like a reasonable place to manage the needs on both a practice that was long enough to effect lasting change and a project short enough so as to encourage participants not to opt out.

Another important stipulation that was established with the participants was that they needed to be rather consistent in their daily lectio divina practice. The participants were informed that they were not expected to complete all 30 days (as great as that would be) but that they must complete at least 21 days. There are several reasons for this 21-day expectation. The first reason was understanding the situation with using volunteers. Probability was extremely high that because all participants were volunteering, there was a large chance that they would miss at least one day. They were encouraged if they missed a day simply to write that into their lectio divina workbook. It was important for

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2009), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 26-27.

the participants to understand that perfection was not expected. Another major reason behind having at least 21 days was the information we know about habits and neuroscience. The brain has to be incentivized through a continual practice with a reward. After a person has taken part in a continual process, or cue, the brain's reward system begins to connect the cue with the reward thereby forming the necessary pieces for a habit.<sup>5</sup> The other reason for making sure all participants have at least 21 days is for the impact on the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Post-test. The more the participants engaged in the lectio divina workbook, the better post-test data would be collected. The results section will show that there were six participants who began the experiment but did not complete the 21-day requirement.

After the completion of the lectio divina project, all the participants who had completed 21 days of the lectio divina workbook were asked to complete the Generalized Anxiety Test again. This was the same test that the participants took before beginning the project. The participants had to take this post-test by September 5, 2017. The reason for this expectation with the participants was to get an accurate assessment of their current orientation after the 30-day lectio divina exercise. In much the same way that the participants had a certain amount of time before beginning the 30-day project, the participants also had the same amount of time to complete the post-test. The goal for all of this is the most accurate data possible.

The goal of this project was to test at two data levels: Quantitative and Qualitative. The Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test used for both the pre- and post-test

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<sup>5</sup> See Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit* (New York, NY: Random House, 2014), 19.

has been outlined above. This is the quantitative data. The Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test has four anxiety ranges: 1. Normal Range 0-21 2. Mild Range 22-34 3. Moderate Range 35-47 4. Severe Range 48-60. Later in this chapter the results are explained from the pre-test scores and the post-test scores and what a 30-day lectio divina exercise can do to produce a more shalom-oriented life.

As part of this project, each participant received a lectio divina workbook for the 30-day process. As already expressed, each participant had to complete at least 21 days of the workbook to be considered part of the research and the post-test. These workbooks were collected from each participant by September 15, 2017. This lectio divina workbook will serve as the qualitative data for this thesis-project. Later in this chapter, the results from the workbook will be examined and the participants will share how much this project meant to them in moving from a more fear-oriented life to a more shalom-oriented life.

### **Demographic Information**

Of the 31 members, 52 percent of the participants were female and 48 percent were male participants. These gender statistics are a consistent picture of Ward Church. Moreover, most churches in America have a higher number of females than males involved within the church at large. Every person who took part in this project was Caucasian. Once again this ethnic demographic is consistent with Ward Church. There is very little ethnic diversity in our church. The table below shows the breakdown of each participant in the thesis-project with their gender and age range.

Table 1. Demographic Breakdown of Participants 1-31 by Gender and Age Range

<i>Participant Number</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age Range</i>
Participant 1	Female	30-35
Participant 2	Male	25-30
Participant 3	Male	50-55
Participant 4	Male	35-40
Participant 5	Male	35-40
Participant 6	Female	65-70
Participant 7	Male	70-75
Participant 8	Male	70-75
Participant 9	Female	75-80
Participant 10	Male	60-65
Participant 11	Female	55-60
Participant 12	Female	40-45
Participant 13	Male	35-40
Participant 14	Female	35-40
Participant 15	Female	70-75
Participant 16	Female	70-75
Participant 17	Female	50-55
Participant 18	Female	60-65
Participant 19	Male	65-70
Participant 20	Female	30-35
Participant 21	Male	30-35
Participant 22	Female	35-40
Participant 23	Male	35-40
Participant 24	Male	30-35
Participant 25	Male	35-40
Participant 26	Female	30-35

Participant 27	Female	35-40
Participant 28	Female	35-40
Participant 29	Male	30-35
Participant 30	Male	75-80
Participant 31	Female	25-30

There was intentionality for this lectio divina project to have diversity in the participants particularly across gender and age range. As Figure 1 reveals, there was a broad age range for those who took part in the project: Age 25-30 7%, Age 30-35 19%, Age 35-40 29%, Age 40-45 3%, Age 50-55 7%, Age 55-60 3%, Age 60-65 7%, Age 65-70 6%, Age 70-75 13%, and Age 75-80 6%.

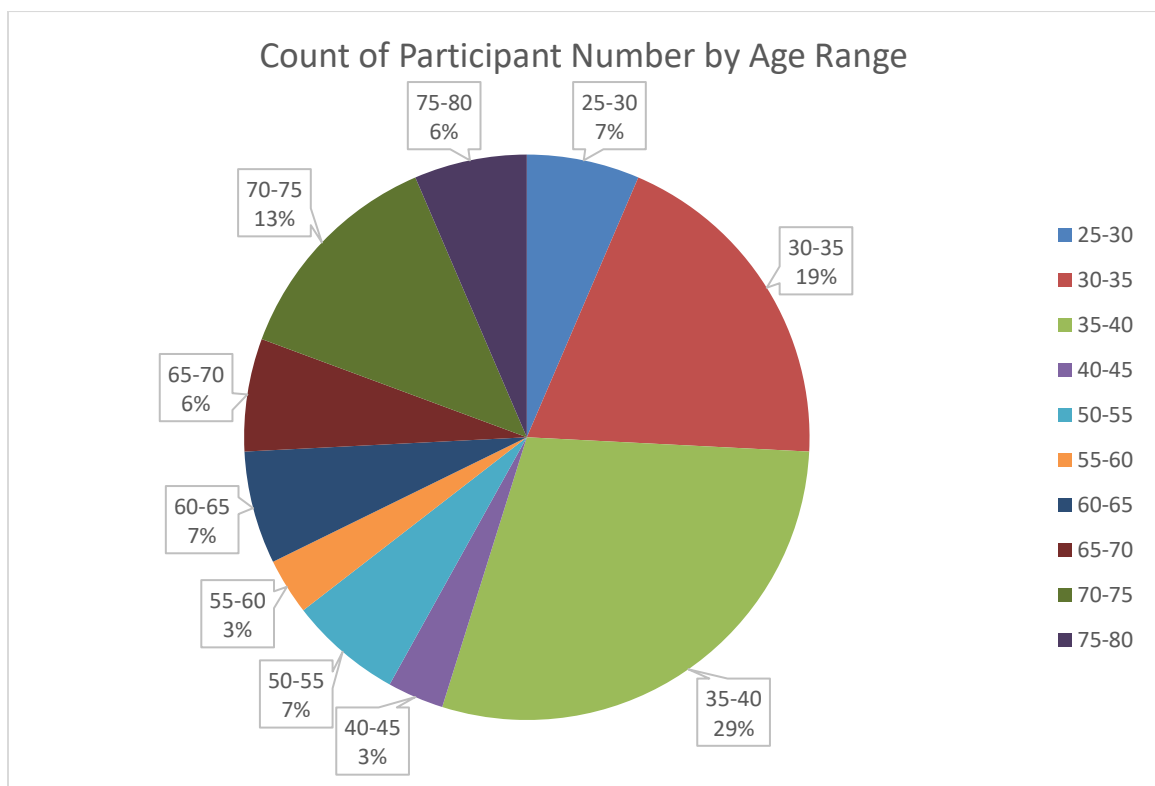


Figure 1. Demographic Breakdown of Participants 1-31 by Age Range

These participants are all members in good standing with Ward Church. All 31 participants have been church members for at least two years. It is safe to assume, from the longevity of membership status and consistent involvement, that these participants are not nominally connected to the church but take their Christian faith seriously and believe that their spiritual formation is a vital expression of their life. In the graph below, the participants are divided among their age groups by gender.

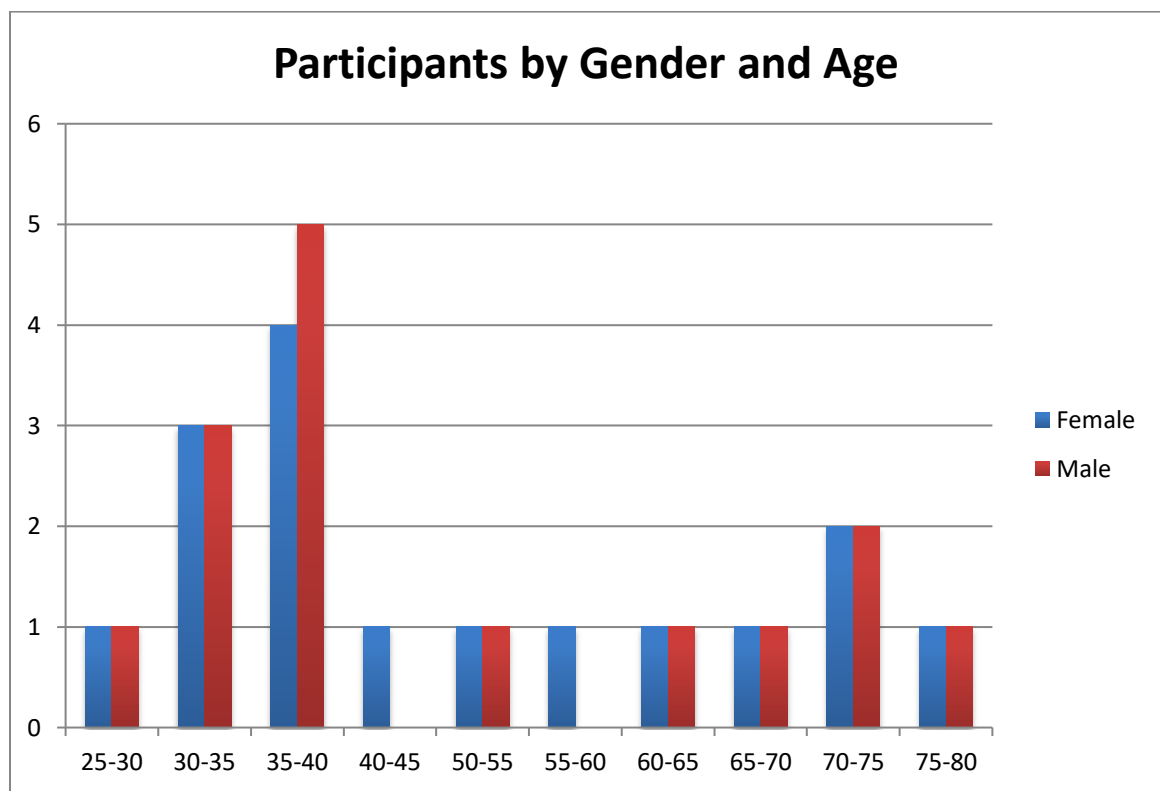


Figure 2. Participants by Gender and Age

It is interesting that age groups 40-55 and 55-60 were only female participants. All other age groups (from 25-80) represented at least one male and one female participant for the study. Of all 31 participants, 20 participants were married to another participant taking part in the lectio divina project. Therefore, 65% of my participants

were married with a partner who was also taking part in the project. There were other married participants in the study but their spouse was not able to participate for multiple reasons. This divided evenly with three male and three female participants who were married and their spouse did not participate. Most relationship status categories are found in the participants, including single, married, divorced and remarried, and widowed. The only relationship status category not found in the participants was divorced. This reveals that there was a broad range of participants and not one particular group involved in the project.

### **Qualitative Results from the Lectio Divina Project**

As mentioned earlier, all participants were asked to complete a 30-day lectio divina workbook from August 1, 2017 through August 30, 2017. The goal of this qualitative research was to receive feedback from the participants on how the lectio divina practice shaped their life positively. The lectio divina workbook was designed for the participants to engage with the scripture passage for each day right next to the passage. The goal was to make the process as easy as possible for the maximum engagement by the participants. The results below were found directly from the lectio divina workbooks. The Scripture passages that were used in the workbooks were passages that had been helpful to the author or were passages that dealt specifically with fear, worry, or peace. The passages were not arranged in any specific order. The participants had to complete at least 21 days of the workbook. If they did not, they were eliminated from the project. Below are the general themes expressed by the participants

throughout the project cited with participant number, day of the project, and page number in the lectio divina workbook.

### Difficulties with Work

Work was a common topic for the participants. Some participants obviously were retired but for those working, the lectio divina practices became a direct application point for their lives. Most of the work implications were connected to stress with their jobs and feeling overwhelmed by the demands of their workplace.

“I’ve been struggling today with the burden of a toxic relationship at work. I feel like God is asking me to be kind to myself because I have not been. I have been so hard on myself for not being the best.” P20 Day 2 (7)

“Focus on him in all I do, give me strength this week at work.” P5 Day 16 (35)

“Constant struggle to give everything over. Lots of work pressure and struggles presently. Seeking his will in this situation.” P5 Day 9 (21)

“With a busy fall at work, I find I default to my own strength and that is exhausting.” P17 Day 1 (5)

“Most of my weariness is from my schedule and work. I need to learn to have more margin.” P17 Day 2 (7)

“There are times in my life where I feel overwhelmed. Projects are due, I travel a lot, and financial needs are needing to be met.” P3 Day 14 (31)

“I think working independent has been a hindrance and I have built bad habits. . . . My key role is to remain ‘in you’ so you can guide me.” P17 Day 11 (25)

“Today was a slow day at work. I ended up feeling agitated.” P23 Day 27 (57)

“Today I felt alone. I was feeling stress at work. There was no one specific incident but a general feeling of unrest.” P23 Day 7 (17)

“This is what it is all about. In the busyness of a crazy week at [work] with two trainings going on and a conference coming. God reminds me not to be anxious in the busyness. He has my back.” P11 Day 1 (5)

“God wants to be part of what I do at work.” P4 Day 11 (25)

### Difficulties with Parenting

As expressed in the demographic section, most participants taking part in the project were married, divorced and remarried, or widowed. Therefore, a lot of circumstances connected to parenting were addressed as part of the lectio divina project. Comments ranged from the exhaustion of parenting, to the concern for the future of their children, to the salvation of children, and concerns for schooling.

“I get overwhelmed thinking of the mother’s responsibility..., but I fear that I am not good enough or doing wrong. I am God’s child, His spirit is in me.” P20 Day 22 (47)

“Focus presently on schooling for kids and seeking wisdom and discernment for his will.” P5 Day 6 (15)

“I’m getting worn out and at the end of my rope with kids this week. Jesus is saying ‘Come to Me’ and he’ll give me the strength to be patient, loving and motivated.” P21 Day 2 (7)

“As the kids go back to school next week, help me to keep this verse at the top of my mind.” P17 Day 18 (39)

“Struggling children have brought some discontentment.” P17 Day 10 (23)

“I want my children to prosper, be wise, and make good decisions and come to know the Lord.” P7 Day 23 (49)

“The first day of school was rough for my youngest child. I am reminded that God wants to meet the needs of my kids as well.” P23 Day 28 (59)

“At times I struggle to feel restful at home. My mind is not at ease and I have trouble just being in the moment with my family.”

“Uncertainty about the future and kids makes me often worry too much.” P27 Day 1 (5)

“Hoping and praying for another child has been very painful and a long journey of learning to trust and believe and accept God’s will.” P27 Day13 (29)

“Preparing for a new school year always comes with worries and fear. I don’t want to just pray for protection, great teachers and new friends. I want to give my children completely into his hands so God may form them.” P27 Day 30 (63)

“I still so easily get anxious – in the deepest sense, for my children because they have turned away from [God] and are looking for fulfillment and satisfaction from the world.” P11 Day 26 (55)

“Tonight I am tired as a mom and sending my kids to their dad to have their needs met. God never tires of me in my neediness.” P12 Day 8 (19)

“I often worry about my kids, from daily safety to when they are older what they will be like. The passage reminds me that God watches over them.” P1 Day 7 (17)

“What does the future hold for my kids and grandkids in a world of turmoil and unrighteousness. . . . I need to move to put my trust in God.” P9 Day 4 (11)

### Difficulties in Marriage

Of the participants who completed the workbook, 88% were married. Therefore, there were several application points to their marriages. It is interesting that there were more direct comments to parenting than marriage. These reasons could range from the more immediate concern parents have for their children, to issues some may have with being vulnerable about marital issues. It is hard to decipher exactly why this is the case that parenting was a more relevant application, but it is worth pointing out.

“Today there was no peace. It was difficult to communicate with my spouse. The word that stuck out to me was peace, because I really could have used some today.” P23 Day 18 (39)

“Lately I have felt [spiritually] attacked in my marriage, even by my own thoughts and to reflect on the Lord standing in front of me with a shield lifts my burdens away. I feel rest.” P20 Day 1 (5)

“I’m losing my temper with my spouse and have zero patience. God’s peace is exactly what I need right now because I hate this anxious and mean spirit.” P21 Day 26 (55)

“My wife does not feel well right now. We are not sure why. Message is to trust and lean not on my own understanding.” P7 Day 9 (21)

“Too often I think of how much I’m failing to be a good Christian wife. I’m scared to fail or disappoint. It steals my joy!” P27 Day 6 (15)

### Circumstances in the World

From August 1, 2017 to August 30, 2017, there were several events that took place in the world that were reflected in multiple lectio divina workbooks. Several commented on the issues with racial division in Charlottesville, VA, the concern with North Korea uncertainty, general terrorism, and the devastation from Hurricane Harvey. It is interesting that the lectio divina exercise from Day 17 shows up multiple times in this section.

“This verse is especially meaningful this week in the situations with North Korea and the USA upheaval in Virginia.” P15 Day 16 (35)

“Last week has seen terror attacks in this country and abroad again. The coverage of these events unsettled me.” P23 Day 17 (37)

“The craziness in Charlottesville, VA this weekend highlights this. . . . You don’t have to fight hate with hate. We’re called to love our enemies. That’s bringing God’s shalom to the world.” P10 Day 18 (39)

“Reminds me to seek rest in him and not in worldly comforts or distractions. Feeling very weary of life’s challenges during this season.” P5 Day 2 (7)

“It is so easy to get wrapped up in the chaos of this world and then get depressed about our government and the swirling crisis of North Korea.” P3 Day 13 (29)

“Stay focused on Christ not on the things of this world. There is so much turmoil in our world. We need to remember God is in control and trust in Him.” P16 Day 17 (37)

“I don’t want the events of this world to shake me. My soul is protected by the Lord himself – My rock and fortress.” P8 Day 5 (13)

“I often worry about what Christians will have to face more and more now and in the future with terrorism. Let me trust and not be afraid.” P27 Day 4 (11)

“Thinking today of al-Assad, Trump, Putin, North Korea. Jesus Christ has triumphed over all earthly powers.” P11 Day 17 (37)

“Bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. I suppose with all that is currently going on in our country (Charlottesville, VA), those words sound so good. It often feels a little crazy here – black against white, religion against religion, country against country.” P18 Day 16 (35)

“Comfort all who mourn is meaning a lot to me right now with all the grieving families who have been affected by the Houston flood.” P1 Day 25 (53)

“All too often I am discouraged by the way of the world and the government.” P9 Day 21 (45)

### Difficult Circumstances

It is important to see that each participant faces unique challenges in their lives.

These difficult circumstances range across of a lot issues from health, to vague circumstances, to issues in the lives of others. These difficult circumstances could not be specifically categorized but obviously were very important to the participants.

“There is no promise that life will be easy, but I am to face the challenges head on with confidence that God will see me through.” P23 Day 21 (45)

“These readings provided the truth and reassurance I needed to hear during tough times.” P23 Conclusion (64)

“Yesterday one of my major projects went wrong. Everything was not packed right and needed be repacked with no time. Everything turned out just fine. It is a lesson of submitting my plans vs. his plan.” P17 Day 9 (21)

“In the last 48 hours I have learned of extended family members who received news of difficult health issues. Both are very surprising. . . . Our focus is on you to satisfy us.” P17 Day 27 (57)

“Being single can be lonely at times. But I must always remember God is with me.” P16 Day 27 (57)

“You, Lord have truly helped me on my journey through the last 2 years of sickness.” P6 Day 2 (7)

“Lord, today this scripture reminds me to stay grounded in you. . . . What will happen if I confront [person] about their addiction?” P28 Day 4 (11)

“I am thinking and praying a lot these days for some friends whose son is dying of cancer.” P12 Day 14 (31)

“We had a family friend pass away today and another unchurched friend have a heart attack.” P12 Day 25 (53)

“What a blessing God gave me from this passage after my son [name] passed away. The comfort and peace was seeing God did not abandon him. God immediately took him on the path of life.” P9 Day 6 (15)

### Personal Impact of Lectio Divina during the Day

The participants on multiple occasions saw a daily impact from the lectio divina exercise. It was interesting to see that the practice had lasting effects on the participants beyond the 15-minute exercise. They saw as they went about the rest of their day that they were more prepared to handle the situations they faced because of the time they spent with God in their lectio divina practice.

“As I’ve been doing these lessons, I hold onto the scripture through my day. I still reflect on what stood out to me.” P20 Day 13 (29)

“Read the scripture a few more times to keep it on my mind for the rest of the day.” P16 Day 3 (9)

“Grace and peace. . . . I really want this in mind through my day.” P16 Day 24 (51)

“I noticed that I could handle my emotions much better after focusing on the daily passage.” P27 Conclusion (64)

“For the most part, I did [the lectio project] early in the day, which helped set the tone for my day.” P18 Conclusion (64)

## Honest days of Disconnection

During the sessions leading up to the 30-day lectio divina exercise, all 31 participants were consulted about how the lectio divina practice works and what is expected of them throughout the project. It was stressed to each participant about the importance of collecting honest data. Each participant understood that the goal of the project was not to fabricate the data to prove the thesis-project, but that honest data is the highest priority. The qualitative data below reveals that there were days of honest disconnection ranging from not connecting with a passage, to not being sure how it applies to their lives, to being hard to concentrate. This supports that spiritual formation is a slow work of God and that each day will not provide the same inspiration. Moreover, the process of spiritual formation should be a continual practice even though there are difficult days. It is interesting to see that Day 17 was the day that multiple people had trouble connecting with the passage. The scripture for that day is below:

### **Colossians**

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

—Colossians 2:8-15

There are couple of reasons why this passage was difficult to connect with for the participants. First, the passage is extremely long. It would probably be difficult to locate the word or phrase the participants heard from God. Secondly, there were multiple themes in this section. It is understandable that this passage was too complex for beginners in the lectio divina process. Below is the entire list of comments of honest disconnection found in the lectio divina workbooks.

“This content was long. It was hard to just meditate on one word.” P20 Day 16 (35)

“I don’t feel this passage really spoke to me in any specific way.” P20 Day 17 (37)

“It was hard to concentrate and I didn’t get much out of this one” P13 Day 17 (37)

“Not sure how to live this out today.” P17 Day 4 (11)

“To be completely honest, this passage did not speak to me at all.” P3 Day 2 (7)

“Nothing really stood out to me in this passage.” P3 Day 28 (59)

“This text was the ‘toughest’ in terms of what it addressed to me. It didn’t speak that much to me.” P25 Day 16 (35)

### Prayers for Life with God

A theme to the lectio divina workbooks was that the participants longed to have a better focus and awareness that God was with them throughout their day. This was an important finding that the participants did not see the practice as simply a 15-minute exercise, but that the implications from the lectio divina practice should have an affect on the rest of their day.

“I was picked for jury duty. . . . I pray Christ would be alive and present as I sit on the jury.” P20 Day 17 (37)

“Go, do, he is with us.” P13 Day 21 (45)

“I feel like God is saying for me to listen. I think I need to focus on listening more throughout my life. That’s what my focus will be today.” P17 Day 8 (19)

“Need to focus more on being a light in the work office. Seek opportunities to share my faith with others.” P5 (Day 13)

“God, help me to fear you and not be influenced by worldly things.” P13 Day 4 (11)

“The invitation today is to concentrate on what is and not get caught up in what could be fearing the future. God has provided for now and I need to be content in that.” P23 Day 10 (23)

“When I am feeling weighed down I need to approach God in prayer and invite him into the situation.” P23 Day 14 (31)

“Lord keep my focus on you. Let me keep this prayer as an ongoing prayer to you today.” P21 Day 3 (9)

“Oh Lord, keep me focused on you alone – not some other rock – some other place of rest or comfort.” P8 Day 3 (9)

“I pray today that I see myself as you see me.” P28 Day 12 (27)

“‘Come to me’ stood out and the reason it stood out is that I typically go so fast that I don’t pause to take time to talk with God about things.” P17 Day 2 (7)

“I can talk to God and ask for help no matter how small the concern.” P3 Day 9 (21)

“Relax as God watches over me and guides me through the day.” P16 Day 7 (17)

“Lord, help me to listen. To stay so engulfed in your love and guidance that I realize the power and wisdom of your commands and live them out.” P21 Day 8 (19)

“I feel God saying, ‘Follow me. Listen and obey and life is much easier and better.’ Today, I’m parking my mind on Jesus and following him. Today is a new day.” P21 Day 21 (45)

“I put my hand in the hand of God.” P8 Day 10 (23)

“I think it’s easy to be discouraged when I fall into the same sin patterns: worry, stress, not slowing down. . . . Lord, praying that I remember you are with me always. I need not be discouraged.” P28 Day 21 (45)

“May I live today grounded in God my refuge – so the frustrations with the new system at work, the gravity of struggles in people’s lives, the traffic jams won’t send me into a tizzy. Help me Lord, to truly live in the light of your truth.” P11 Day 13 (29)

“God please be with me and work through me.” P25 Day 11 (25)

“God, help me to rely on you for my day to day. Help me make you a part of what I do and let it bring you glory.” P4 Day 11 (25)

### Confidence in God’s Presence

It is so easy for Christians to forget that God is with them through whatever they face. It is apparent from the lectio divina project that the practice provided the participants the opportunity to remember God’s presence is with them no matter what the circumstances may be. In knowing that God would never leave them, the participants gained confidence that God was for them and that he would see them through whatever they could face.

“In the middle of my struggles, God is not giving up on me and will not abandon me.” P23 Day 6 (15)

“God is with me at all times. I have confidence in God watching over me.” P23 Day 12 (27)

“I am reminded again of God’s love for me and that he will take care of me.” P23 Day 28 (59).

“The Maker of heaven and earth has my back forevermore.” P13 Day 7 (17)

“There is only one God and if he is pulling for us, what in the entire world could compete against him?” P13 Day 30 (63)

“God is my rock and my fortress. I cannot be taken away from him.” P15 Day 5 (13)

“He will watch over my life! He will be at the ready to help me!” P15 Day 7 (17)

“God is my calm in the chaos. The service project was a hectic week but he provided all along the way.” P10 Day 10 (23)

“Be Courageous – He is with me!” P10 Day 21 (45)

“God and I will walk together. I can’t do it alone, and God will not do it for me, but we will do it together but I have to ask.” P3 Day 19 (41)

“It is comforting to know that God is with me, watching over me and walking beside me every day.” P3 Day 7 (17)

“He is with us always. Be happy He is with us.” P19 Day 12 (27)

“No matter what is happening God is with me!” P25 Day 6 (15)

“To be in the Lord’s presence and to know that He is in control. . . . I am not a great person nor have I accomplished great things, I know that with the Lord, I am where I need to be.” P18 Day 10 (23)

“God is among us, with us every moment of every day.” P1 Day 1 (5)

### Letting Go of Control

One difficulty for Christians who have been successful (many in this project) is their longing to always control their environment. In most areas of their lives, these participants have been successful in controlling outcomes that they may face. However, what can be found from the lectio divina workbooks is that great stress comes with our inevitable inability to control all areas of our lives. The participants’ longing to control their environment only produced greater fear. They knew that shalom was only available through surrendering control to God.

“God wants to carry me through the stressful circumstance. I should learn to trust more and not try to carry all of life’s burdens alone.” P23 Day 2 (7)

“I should not overreact to small things. Trust that everything will be ok, and to be more relaxed at home.” P23 Day 5 (13)

“The application today is to remain in Christ for all areas of my life. It is a daily struggle to submit everything to him, but I need to keep learning to let more go.” P23 Day 11 (25)

“May I seek out all areas to let go and hand over control.” P5 Day 3 (9)

“I believe God is asking me to follow him and see where he takes me.” P3 Day 1 (5)

“Nagging doubts (as always) just before a big project. Did we take on too much? Am I up for it? Keep turning my mind back to him who is in control.” P10 Day 3 (9)

“There is no need to be afraid, up tight, or frustrated because God is in control and not me.” P16 Day 4 (11)

“When I thought I was in control of my life and actions, I really messed things up. Thanks Lord for taking over. Life is much better for me with you in charge.” P7 Day 17 (37)

“Don’t worry. God is in control.” P19 Day 1 (5)

“I can rest knowing God is in control over all things.” P19 Day 6 (15)

“God calls me to submit to him, to give up control, and to trust him that he has a straight path before me.” P4 Day 9 (21)

### Participants’ True Identity

One common correlation is the participant naming their true identity through the lectio divina project and greater rest. The participants found it easier to name a false-identity rather than their true identity. It is obvious from multiple participants that the lectio divina project created space for the participants to be reminded of their true identity as a child of God. It is interesting that Day 22 was cited the most for the participants in this section. The scripture passage for Day 22 is below.

## Galatians

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

—Galatians 4:4-7

It makes sense why Day 22 was cited the most because this passage speaks so clearly to the Christian’s true identity as a child of God. It is so easy to forget this identity in our world and this passage is a great reminder. Below is the entire list of participants’ comments on true identity.

“I am reminded that my identity is found in Christ. . . . No situation, trial or failure can change who I am.” P23 Day 22 (47)

“Challenges become easier and lighter when I am not doing the work alone and my way. The better approach is rest in him.” P15 Day 2 (7)

“I am the daughter of the king of kings.” P15 Day 4 (11)

“I am not a slave but reborn to be your child. Reborn as an heir.” P15 Day 22 (47)

“Imagery of the Lord holding my hand when I seek Him and call upon his name.” P5 Day 19 (41)

“I am His child.” P5 Day 22 (47)

“I need to remember God delights in me.” P21 Day 12 (27)

“I am of great value to the Lord. He will take care of me.” P10 Day 12 (27)

“We are God’s children and all the promises that we read about will be afforded to us.” P3 Day 16 (35)

“What wonder that I could understand and live out more fully this blessed identity – I’ve been set free and no longer a slave.” P11 Day 22 (47)

“Because I am an adopted son [of God], I am no longer a slave to sin. My daddy is there for me – I’m his son.” P30 Day 22 (47)

“God delights in us. We are his sons and daughters. What a beautiful inheritance and life we have in him!” P1 Day 16 (35)

“This word, heir, defines who I am and that brings such a secure feeling. I am God’s child.” P9 Day 22 (47)

“I am God’s child and an heir to his kingdom.” P4 Day 22 (47)

## Peace

The goal of the project was to test if a shalom-oriented life could be found for a Christian who took part in a continual lectio divina exercise. It is no surprise that the participants prayed and declared peace over their life. It is apparent from the number of participants that all have a desire for more peace in their lives. This qualitative data once again supports the thesis-project that every person is looking for the shalom-oriented life.

“I need more peace today than understanding. Understanding is sometimes negative rather than positive. I mostly need your peace.” P15 Day 18 (39)

“Lord I desire more of your grace and peace.” P15 Day 24 (51)

“I’m thinking that I need to manage my future schedule to have more margin. With more margin there is peace.” P17 Day 7 (17)

“Listen to the Holy Spirit, a wonderful source of peace.” P7 Day 26 (55)

“The peace Jesus leaves me with does surpass understanding and reminds me not to be troubled and afraid.” P15 Day 26 (55)

“The world gives me screaming and chaos. God brings peace.” P10 Day 26 (55)

“Seek peace in all I do. Give over to him and do not worry about tomorrow.” P5 Day 26 (55)

“The God of peace promises to be with us in all things. What an awesome promise.” P16 Day 18 (39)

“Problems and feelings can erupt and take away my peace and security. Relying on him for all the rest of my days here on earth give me assurance.” P6 Day 5 (13)

“God, you made me alive in Christ – It has been such a blessing to give back as I have received so many blessings from you. It has given me peace of mind in the turmoil of my troubles.” P6 Day 17 (37)

“Your peace is always available for me, but do I tap into the resource?” P28 Day 26 (55)

“Rest in the peace that he is always watching over us.” P19 Day 12 (27)

“Do not be anxious about anything. The God of peace will be with you.” P19 Day 18 (39)

“God help me to worry less and trust more. Give me your peace.” P25 Day 29 (61)

“God will give me peace.” P30 Day 18 (39)

“I accept and cling to your gift of peace.” P30 Day 26 (55)

“May I always rest in your peace and seek it alone.” P12 Day 26 (55)

“What an incredible promise and hope that we can rest in his peace that passes all understanding!” P1 Day 26 (55)

“God personally is my rock forever 24/7 throughout my life and eternally. Therefore I can have perfect peace. I lost something this week and was consumed by it and I prayed and prayed to find it. I did not find it but I turned it over to God and stopped worrying and I felt so much peace and still have that peace.” P9 Day 3 (9)

“His grace is beyond measure and the peace he gives me will overshadow my fear.” P9 Day 24 (51)

“Regardless of how God chooses to answer my prayers, he will give me peace.” P4 Day 18 (39)

“God is with me no matter what, therefore there is no reason to be afraid or discouraged. Fear is no longer with me because God is always by my side.” P4 Day 21 (45)

“I am realizing that Peace is always within reach.” P20 Day 26 (55)

## No Margin in Life

One thing that is apparent from the data is that the participants are trying to balance a lot of things in their lives (e.g. relationships, jobs, marriages, kids, time for self, etc.). Several times the participants recognized that their spiritual vibrancy was hindered because of having too many things going on. The usual pattern for the participants (an indictment of American culture in general) is to fill every available minute with some task to accomplish. Through the lectio divina exercise, participants created space to be present with God. This space allowed them to realize they do not have the appropriate margins in their lives. This data supports the conviction for a mandatory two-minute silence at the start of each lectio divina exercise for the participants to be present with God rather than jumping to complete the lectio divina reading for the day like it was a task to be accomplished.

“Today I have been running 100 mph checking things off my reminder list. . . . Doing today’s lesson at 8:30 pm because I almost forgot. God is telling me to rest in him and be steadfast.” P3 Day 3 (9)

“Most of my weariness is from my schedule and work.” I need to learn to have more margin.” P17 Day 2 (7)

“This is timely. Life will be running at 100mph next week with the service project. As a leader, I need to be looking for his direction and sheltering in his rest.” P10 Day 2 (7)

“Life feels like a constant running from one thing to another.” P27 Day 3 (9)

“Just being frustrated of how hard it is to find silence in my life.” P12 Day 9 (21)

“My phrase is ‘rest in God.’ My life is touched particularly by this perhaps because I am such a busy-natured person that this is what I struggle with.” P18 Day 5 (13)

## Fear and the Power of God

The goal of this project was to prove whether a continual 30-day lectio divina exercise could move a Christian from a more fear-oriented life to a more shalom-oriented life. It is obvious from the qualitative data below that multiple participants found power in the promises of God to overcome their fears. The data below reveals once again that Christians struggle with fear and through a continual lectio divina exercise, God can meet those with a fear orientation and remind them of his power to provide transformation and healing.

“When I retreat to pray and study – I am not shaken, no fear, no anxiety, nothing can stand in the way to make me unsettled.” P20 Day 5 (13)

“God is helping me overcome fear, and not be afraid to take chances.” P20 Day 13 (29)

“When I take God’s hand, I am surrendering my fears, and following.” P20 Day 19 (41)

“The Lord your God is with you, do not fear.” P5 Day 12 (27)

“I am thankful that God has opened my eyes to the fact that I worry too much about things only he controls.” P20 Day 29 (61)

“I will not fear knowing that I don’t have to travel alone.” P3 Day 26 (55)

“Perfect Peace is giving up my desires [in order] to rest on him.” P13 Day 3 (9)

“Nothing, nothing can compare to knowing Christ and his death and resurrection.” P15 Day 20 (43)

“I will put my trust in him alone and cast out all fear knowing that God is my strength and redeemer.” P5 Day 1 (5)

“It’s amazing to think about all that God can handle and it gives me pause to realize that I don’t need to worry about anything.” P17 Day 17 (37)

“I do not have the ability to grasp God’s power but he has it and he will protect and guide me. I am so blessed.” P7 Day 7 (17)

“I have God standing with me. Nothing can get between us unless I let them. My advocate is bigger than any of that stuff and my issues pale in comparison.” P10 Day 30 (63)

“It is up to me to make the surrender of trusting my life with God and letting him lead me. Letting him be my ultimate help.” P21 Day 7 (17)

“No power of judgment or fear can slow down what God is doing in my life.” P21 Day 17 (37)

“God, you are the rock eternal. Give me that perfect peace in the midst of a storm.” P6 Day 3 (9)

“As I go to bed and take my hearing devices off, I’ve wondered if I would know in advance that there is a fire in the house because I can’t hear the alarm. But God is watching over me and is just so comforting.” P6 Day 7 (17)

“Lord, you call me to enter your rest. I am hearing a pattern about the life you choose for me. One of rest, anxiety-free, chains undone.” P28 Day 15 (33)

“I’ve got a lot going on right now. . . . I need to go back and find my rest in him, to not allow myself to be shaken.” P11 Day 5 (13)

“Though my strength and health slip away, I will not be discouraged because God is with me. That’s all I need. He is my anchor and foundation.” P30 Day 21 (45)

“I know that whatever challenges I face, God will be with me, and so I do not need to fear anything.” P18 Day 21 (45)

“This passage speaks to me right now because I can easily get overwhelmed with everything going on.” P1 Day 1 (5)

“God wants me to remember that my relationship with him means that I no longer need to fear!” P4 Day 12 (27)

### Participants’ Personal Assessment through the Lectio Divina Project

In the next section, the quantitative data will be examined. But closing out the qualitative data, it is important to see from several participants that there was personal improvement through the lectio divina practice. Participants were able to personally assess that they experienced less fear in their lives through this lectio divina project.

From a qualitative standpoint, this supports the thesis-project that a continual lectio divina practice can provide a more shalom-oriented life for Christians.

“Today it was easier to let go of small situations and fears.” P20 Day 4 (11)

“Since beginning this practice I have noticed I am not worrying as much, I can hear God’s voice.” P20 Day 29 (61)

“Lord, over the past 10 days of doing this prayer study I have found myself calming and quieting myself with the scripture and your help.” P17 Day 10 (23)

“What an amazing experience. I can honestly say I feel a change in myself. It was so good to hear God’s voice and be aware of what his presence feels like.” P20 Conclusion (64)

“I was reflecting on how God has used the last two weeks to show me areas of my life that I need his help.” P23 Day 15 (33)

“I need to work at turning things over to him. This project of the 30 days is helping me to keep more focused on him.” P16 Day 21 (45)

“The Lord has given me some great treasure from this project. None of these scriptures were new to me but all affected me differently than before. I want to say that my fear or worry or self-doubt will never be conquered but I have a new set of tools to employ.” P15 Conclusion (64)

“I have been challenged to spend more time meditating and reflecting. I pray that this format of silence and reflection is something that I am reminded of to continue going forward.” P5 Conclusion (64)

“Before I began I was dreading the routine. By the time it ended I was looking forward to the study each day and in a way did not want it to end.” P7 Conclusion (64)

“I plan to work the [lectio divina] practice into my devotional routine..., to make my ‘quiet time’ a little more quiet on a regular basis.” P10 Conclusion (64)

“I don’t often read and reflect the way that I was asked to do during this project, and what felt a little uncomfortable in the beginning became way more natural by the end.” P3 Conclusion (64)

“This 30-day session has forced me, in a good way, to meditate on the word and to listen to what God is trying to tell me, and then redirect my life according to that message.” P3 Day 23 (49)

“I very much enjoyed the lectio process – the silence and the slowing down. It will take continued practice for it to be a habit for me to better control my mind.” P28 Conclusion (64)

“The project really helped to be more positive having less fear and worries.” P25 Conclusion (64)

**Quantitative Results from the Lectio Divina Project**

The 31 participants were also tested on quantitative data points. These participants from Ward Church who chose to take part in the lectio divina project were pre-tested using a Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test. Figure 3 outlines all pre-test scores for the 31 participants.

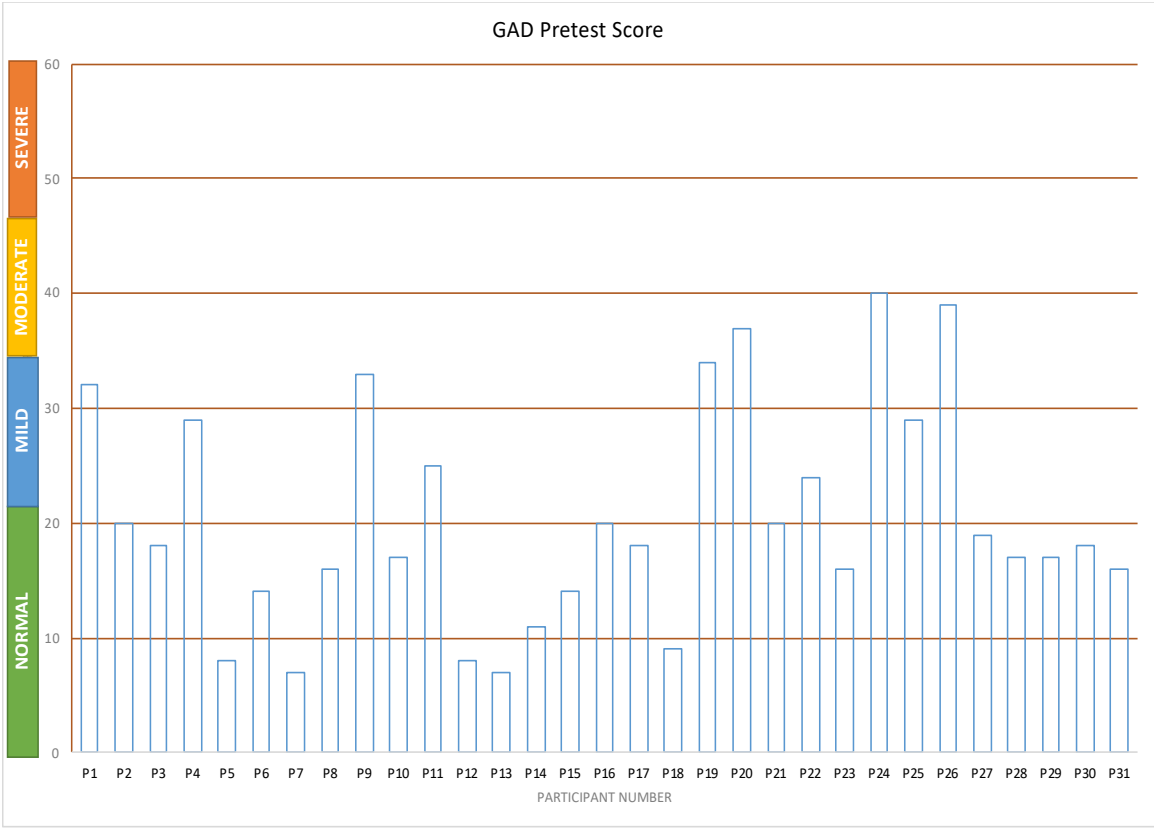


Figure 3. Generalized Anxiety Disorder Pre-test Scores

The data from the pre-test results was collected July 25, 2017 through July 31, 2017. The goal of collecting the data during this time frame was to ensure that data collected was an honest assessment of the fear orientation for the 31 participants just before beginning the 30-day lectio divina project. The Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test has four anxiety ranges: 1. Normal Range 0-21 2. Mild Range 22-34 3. Moderate Range 35-47 4. Severe Range 48-60. Twenty-one participants scored within the normal range of anxiety while 10 participants scored in the mild and moderate range for anxiety. While roughly 66% of the participants did not have a psychologically diagnosed expression of anxiety, it is obvious from the workbooks that they were affected by fear, worry, and anxiety. It would be wrong to assume (based on the evidence from the workbooks) that someone who scores within the normal range of anxiety does not have any issues with fear or worry in their lives.

After the pretest, the 31 participants took part in the 30-day lectio divina project that lasted from August 1, 2017 to August 30, 2017. After August 30, 2017, the participants had until September 5, 2017 to retake the same Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test for their post-test results. The only participants allowed to take part in the post-test were the participants who had completed at least 21 days of the lectio divina project. The reason for this was to ensure as much as possible that the lectio divina project had the closest correlation to the post-test results. The goal was to ensure as much as accuracy in the data points. The post-test results are compared to the pre-test results from the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test in Figure 4 below.

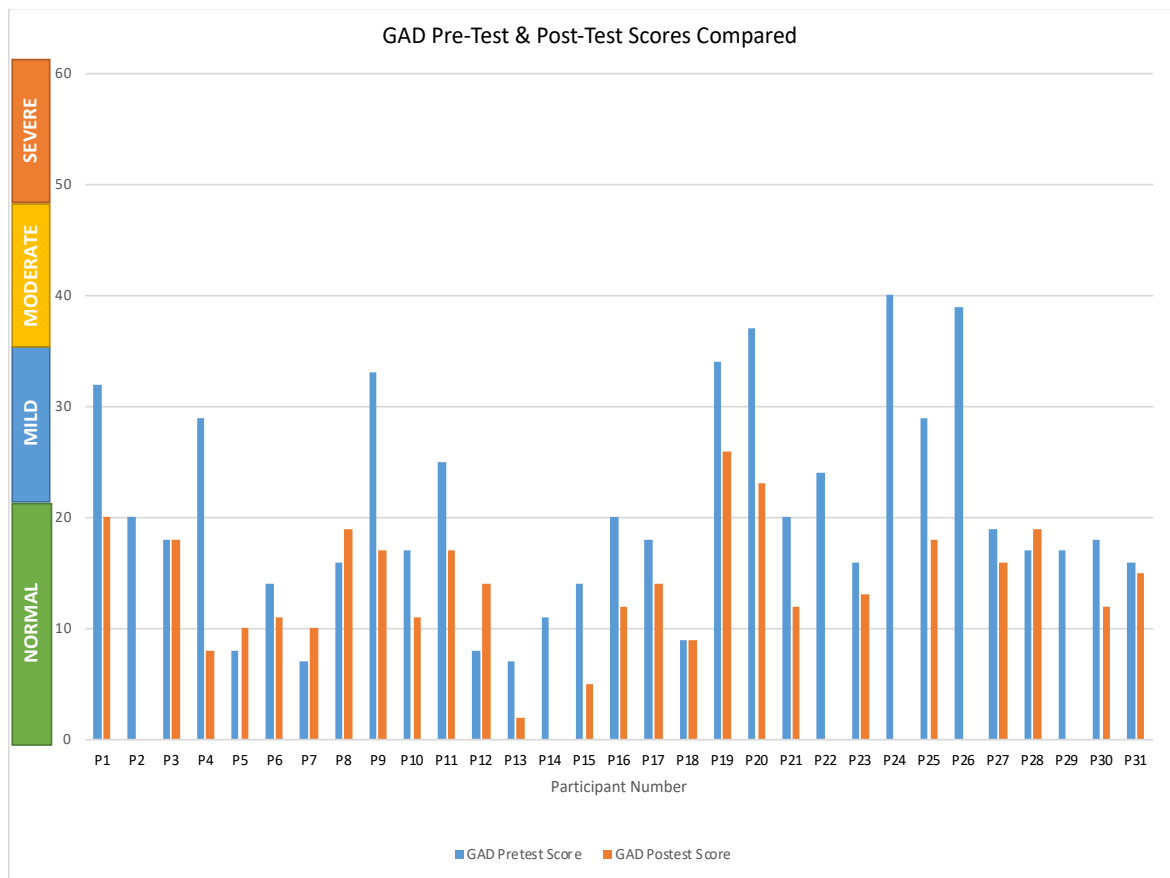


Figure 4. Generalized Anxiety Disorder Pre-test and Post-test Scores Compared

Of the 31 participants who took the pre-test, 25 participants completed the 21-day requirement of the lectio divina workbook. Participants 2, 14, 22, 24, 26, and 29 did not complete the lectio divina requirement. Figure 5 shows the analysis of the post-test results for four groups: 1. Increased Fear (GAD Post-test score went up) 2. No Change (GAD Post-test the same as Pre-test) 3. Did Not Complete (six participants who did not complete the 21-day lectio divina requirement) 4. Decreased Fear (GAD Post-test score went down).

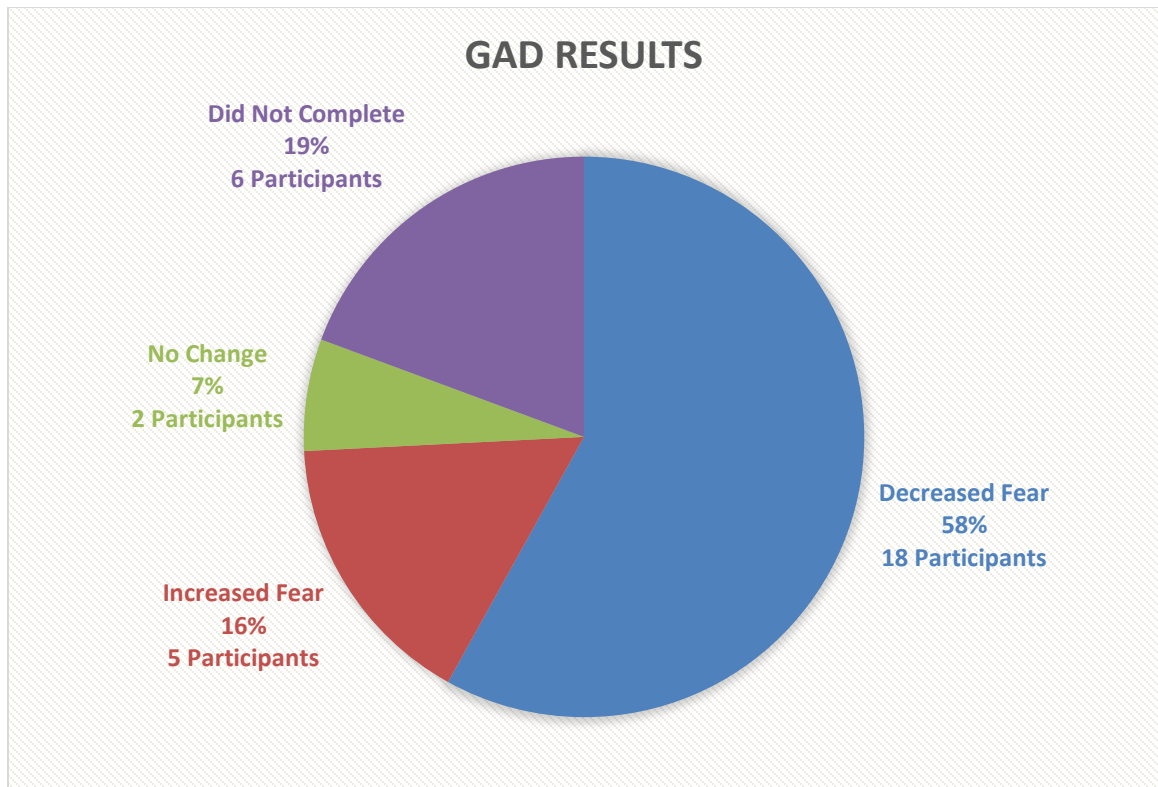


Figure 5. Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test Results by Groups

Of the 25 participants who completed the post-test, 18 of the participants saw a decrease in anxiety levels. These are outstanding results. From the data points, someone who takes part in a 30-day lectio divina exercise regardless of the levels of fear-orientation, the results reveal they can decrease in their post-test score on average by 19%. Later we will look at the participants who tested higher than the normal range of anxiety ( $>22$ ) and examine their post-test results separately. There were two participants that scored the same on both the pre-test and post-test. There were five participants that scored a higher post-test score. Below we will examine both of these post-test groups starting with the two participants that tested the same in Figure 6.

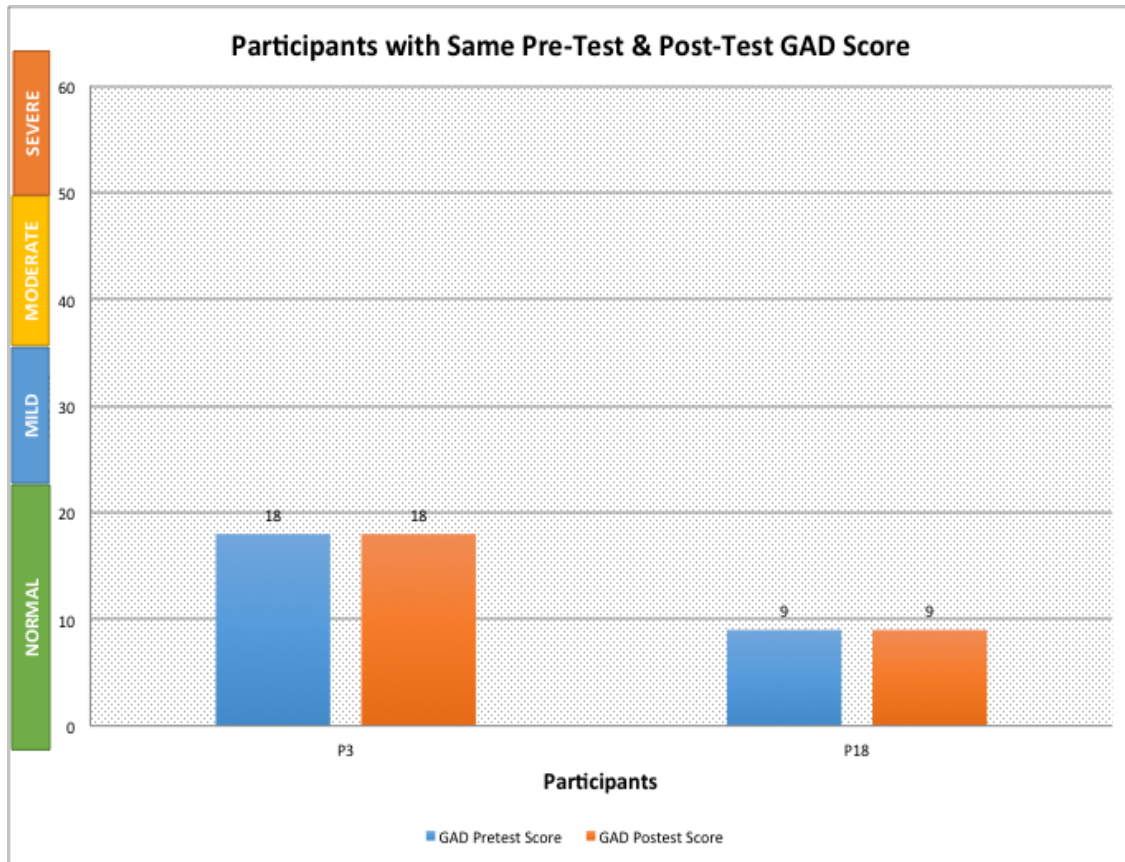


Figure 6. Participants with Same Pre-test and Post-test GAD Score

In assessing the data for the two participants who scored the same on the pre-test and the post-test, Participant 3 scored 18 both times and Participant 18 scored 9 both times. What needs to be pointed out is that in both cases, both participants are still well within the normal range of anxiety for the GAD test (<23). Because they scored well within the range, their results do not disconfirm the hypothesis. Next in Figure 7, we will assess the participants whose post-test results were higher than their pre-test scores.

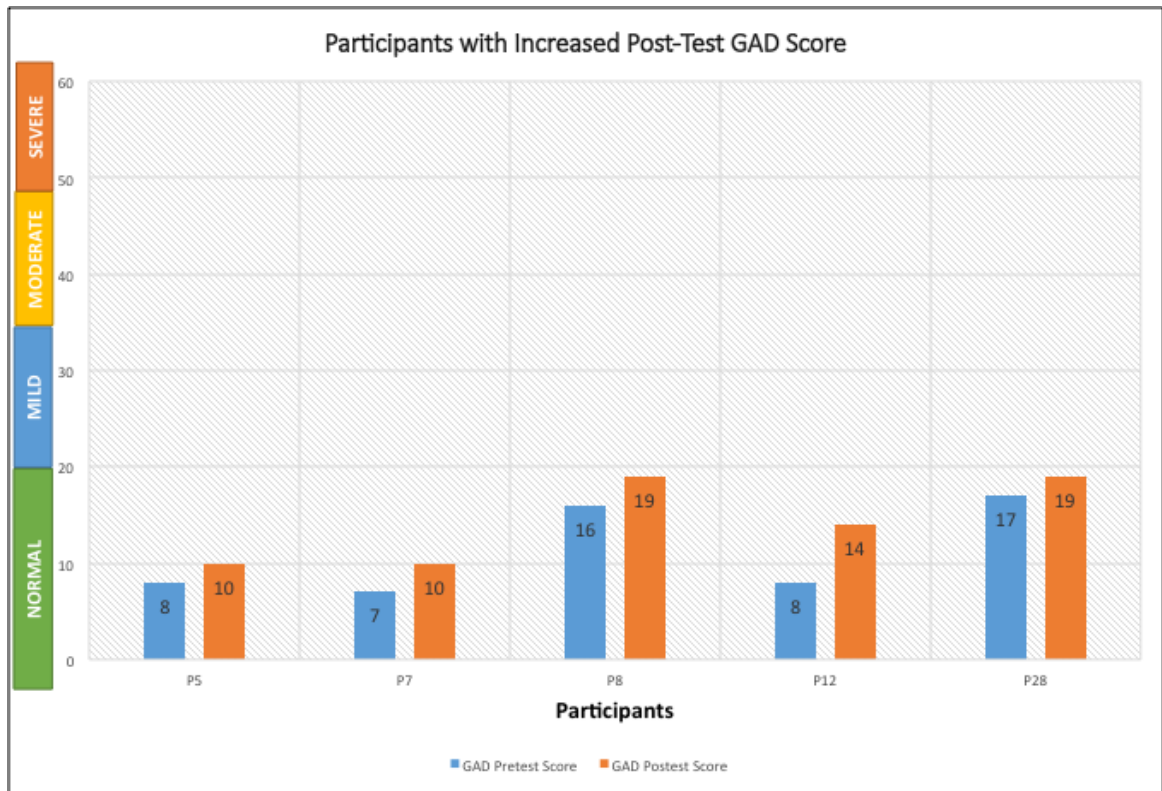


Figure 7. Participants with Increased Post-test GAD Score

In assessing the quantitative data points, five out of 25 participants scored higher on their post-test Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test than their pre-test. Participant 5 moved from a pre-test score of 8 to 10, Participant 7 moved from a pre-test score of 7 to 10, Participant 8 moved from a pre-test score of 16 to 19, Participant 12 moved from a pre-test score of 8 to 14, and Participant 28 moved from a pre-test score of 17 to 19. What needs to be pointed out is that in all of these cases, every participant was still well within the normal range of anxiety for the GAD test (<23). Because they scored well within the range, their results do not disconfirm the hypothesis. Moreover, when the qualitative data is examined, it is apparent that all of these participants saw great value in the lectio divina project despite the fact that their Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test scores increased.

Below are statements of personal progress through the lectio divina workbook for all five participants whose post-test scores were higher than their pre-test scores:

“I have been challenged to spend more time meditating and reflecting. I pray that this format of silence and reflection is something that I am reminded of to continue going forward.” P5 Conclusion (64)

“I will put my trust in him alone and cast out all fear knowing that God is my strength and redeemer.” P5 Day 1 (5)

“Before I began I was dreading the routine. By the time it ended I was looking forward to the study each day and in a way did not want it to end.” P7 Conclusion (64)

“When I thought I was in control of my life and actions, I really messed things up. Thanks Lord for taking over. Life is much better for me with you in charge.” P7 Day 17 (37)

“I don’t want the events of this world to shake me. My soul is protected by the Lord himself – My rock and fortress.” P8 Day 5 (13)

“May I always rest in your peace and seek it alone.” P12 Day 26 (55)

“I think it’s easy to be discouraged when I fall into the same sin patterns: worry, stress, not slowing down. . . . Lord, praying that I remember you are with me always. I need not be discouraged.” P28 Day 21 (45)

“I very much enjoyed the lectio process – the silence and the slowing down. It will take continued practice for it to be a habit for me to better control my mind.” P28 Conclusion (64)

Next, we will assess the participants whose pre-test results put them in the mild to moderate range of anxiety and their results from the post-test.

Of all the 31 participants that took part in the project, ten participants scored higher than 22 on the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test. Participants that scored in the mild and moderate anxiety range show a psychological orientation towards fear and worry and should seek a mental health professional. Table 2 shows the range description break down from the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test.

Table 2. Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test Range Descriptions

Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test Range	Description
Normal 0-21	Your score is within the normal range. If anxiety symptoms bother you, however, you should still contact a medical healthcare professional for further evaluation.
Mild 22-34	Your score indicates that you may have mild generalized anxiety disorder. You should consult with a mental health professional for further evaluation and possible treatment. If you are already receiving treatment for generalized anxiety disorder, take the GAD test once a week to evaluate effectiveness of the treatment.
Moderate 35-47	According to your score, you are rated as having moderate generalized anxiety disorder. You should consult with a mental health professional for further evaluation and treatment. If you are already receiving treatment for generalized anxiety disorder, take the GAD test once a week to evaluate effectiveness of the treatment.
Severe 48-60	According to your score, you have severe generalized anxiety disorder. You should consult with a mental health professional for further evaluation and treatment. If you are already receiving treatment for generalized anxiety disorder, take the GAD test once a week to evaluate effectiveness of the treatment.

Seven participants scored within the mild range (22-34): Participant 1 scored 32, Participant 4 scored 29, Participant 9 scored 33, Participant 11 scored 25, Participant 19 scored 34, Participant 22 scored 24, and Participant 25 scored 29. Three participants scored within the moderate range (35-47): Participant 20 scored 37, Participant 24 scored 40, and Participant 26 scored 39.

Unfortunately, of these participants that scored higher than the normal range (>21), Participant 22 of the pre-test mild range and Participants 24 and 26 of the pre-test moderate range, did not complete the necessary 21-day requirement for the lectio divina

project so their post-test results were removed. However, seven participants who tested higher than the normal range in their pre-test results completed at least 21 days of the lectio divina project and their post-test results are below in Figure 8.

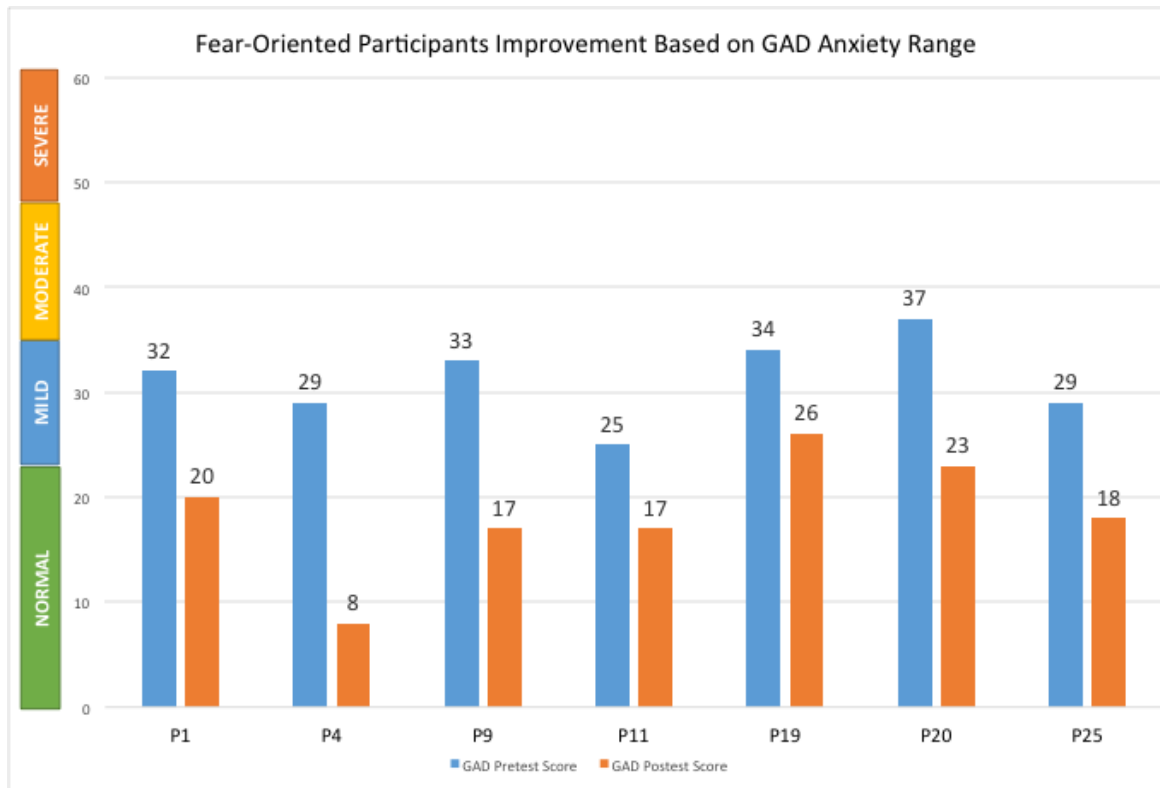


Figure 8. Fear-oriented Participants' Pre-test and Post-test Results

It is amazing to see that those with a marked fear orientation (GAD scores >22) all saw improvement during their post-test results. In every case with a participant with a marked fear-oriented life, every participant who completed the lectio divina project went down in fear and more towards a shalom-oriented life! In looking deeper into the data, five out of the seven participants with a marked fear orientation through their pre-test scores all had such remarkable improvement that they moved out of the mild range of anxiety and into the normal range. Participant 1 scored 20 (pre-test 32), Participant 4

scored 8 (pre-test 29), Participant 9 scored 17 (pre-test 33), Participant 11 scored 17 (pre-test 25), and Participant 25 scored 18 (pre-test 29). Participant 4 showed the most improvement of anyone in the study with a post-test score 72% percent lower (followed closely by Participant 13 with a 71% improvement) than their pre-test score.

Participant 19 scored 34 on their pre-test. This score is the highest score before you enter into the moderate range (35-37) on the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test. The post-test score of 26 puts them in the lower end of the mild range. Participant 20 scored the highest pre-test score for the project that could be tested (Participant 24 and 26 scored higher but did not complete the required 21 days for the lectio divina project). Participant 20 scored in the moderate range of anxiety with a pre-test score of 37. But after the 30-day lectio divina project they moved to 23! Through this lectio divina project, Participant 20 almost moved from the moderate range of anxiety to the normal range. They are still classified in the mild range but they are right on the line.

Figure 9 shows the breakdown of the participants who moved down into the normal range and the participants who moved down into the mild range.

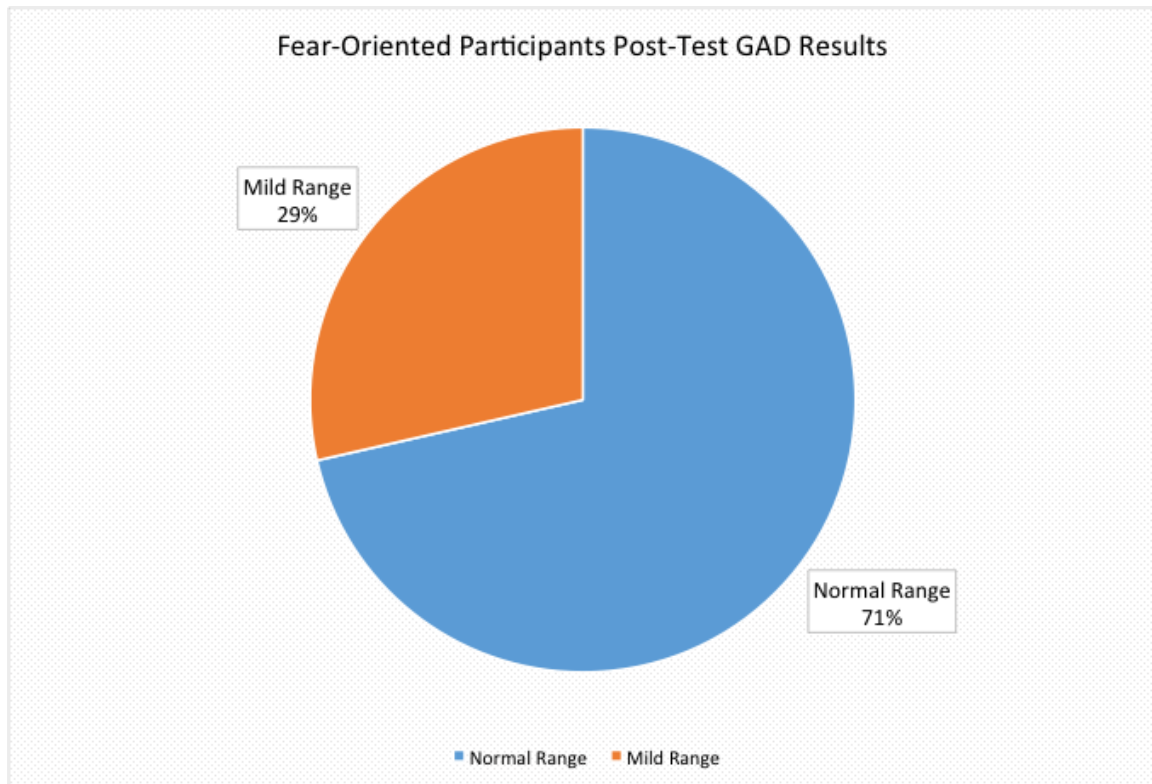


Figure 9. Fear-oriented Participants' Post-test GAD Results

Through a continual practice of lectio divina, those marked with a fear-oriented life all moved down in fear and anxiety toward a shalom-oriented life. 71% moved into the normal range of the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test and 29% moved from moderate and upper mild range to the lower and borderline mild range. From the quantitative data found on the fear-oriented participants (>22), if a Christian with a fear-oriented life takes part in a 30-day lectio divina exercise they can potentially see an improvement in their Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test scores by an average of 41%. Even if Participant 4 is removed from the average (72% improvement is an outlier), the collective average of improvement is still 36% lower.

## Conclusion

The evidence from the qualitative data found in the lectio divina workbooks and the quantitative data found in the pre-test and post-test Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test results has confirmed this author's initial belief that through a continual 30-day lectio divina exercise a Christian can move from a more fear-oriented life to a more shalom-oriented life. In a culture where fear-oriented living is on the rise, a Christian can move more toward a shalom-oriented life through lectio divina. The premise of this work is that this ancient spiritual practice, lectio divina, provides a profound resource for a Christian in developing quality habits that lead to proper spiritual formation. This lectio divina practice also connects the three tenets of spiritual formation (Scripture, Prayer, and Reflection) discussed earlier in the paper.<sup>6</sup>

Through the data found in the lectio divina workbooks, the overwhelming positive response from all participants was that this practice qualitatively impacted their lives for the better. There were only a few participants who commented difficulty connecting with a Scripture reading for the day. These examples were very few but were honest feedback for the project. Participants commented on how their fears, anxieties, and worries decreased by the end of the lectio divina experiment.

Through the quantitative data gathered from the pre-test and post-test Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test results, regardless of your score the lectio divina practice can help improve your post-test score on average of 19%. If you have a marked fear-oriented life (>22), practicing lectio divina can help improve your score on average of 41%. These

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Two: Shalom and Spiritual Formation.

results seem to show that those with mild or moderate anxiety levels, have a higher likelihood that a 30-day lectio divina practice can produce profound positive changes towards a shalom-oriented life. We are uncertain at this point whether the same outcomes exist for those with severe anxiety simply because there was not a participant in the project who scored in the severe range (48-60) on the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Test. Moreover, from this project, there appears to be a higher likelihood that the higher the level of anxiety, the more unlikely it is the participant will complete the 21-day requirement in the lectio divina workbook. Participant 24 scored 40 and participant 26 scored 39 which were the highest anxiety scores in the project and neither participant completed the minimum requirement in the lectio divina workbooks.

The next step is to determine how we take the lectio divina practice further into the practice of the church and how could a Christian move from a more fear-oriented life to a more shalom-oriented life.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS FOR THE CHURCH

#### **The Shalom-Oriented Life**

The goal of this paper was to declare that the shalom-oriented life was God's great invitation to humanity. It was a life of universal flourishing. It was the life God always intended for us from the beginning of creation. It is a world found in and held together by God. Wendell Berry writes, "The world was created and approved by love, that it subsists, coheres, and endures by love, and that, insofar as it is redeemable, it can be redeemed only by love. . . . That divine love, incarnate and indwelling in the world, summons the world toward wholeness, which ultimately is reconciliation and atonement with God.<sup>1</sup> God summons all creation toward shalom. Life with God is the great longing of our souls.

As discussed in detail in Chapter two, shalom (שלום) is best translated as wholeness. God's design was for humanity to experience wholeness in every sphere of life: wholeness with God, wholeness with others, wholeness with creation, and wholeness with ourselves. God's invitation was for humanity to experience more and more this type of integration. This could be called the shalom-oriented life. It is the life that everyone is searching for and yet is available right here in this moment with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2003), 146.

Sadly however, our lives have been marked by more and more disintegration. Wholeness feels so distant to our souls and bodies. Rather than a shalom-oriented life, our lives have been marked by an increasing fear orientation. Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have experienced an increasing rise in fear-related illnesses: anxiety, depression, panic disorder, constant worry, etc. There is a deep internal restlessness that plagues us. Ancients and moderns have all searched for a solution.

This paper has reinforced that the shalom-oriented life is what we are all seeking. It has also reinforced the shalom-oriented life is what we were designed for and the importance spiritual formation plays in recovering this way of life. Shalom is essential to our very being and lectio divina is a practice that is crucial for us in rediscovering the wholeness that was lost.

### **Overarching Themes**

Going into this project, there was a general assessment that Christians in our community and church were experiencing the effects of fear orientation in their lives. This was something that I hoped could be addressed by this thesis-project and the lectio divina practice. In assessing the overall outcomes, the results overwhelmingly support the original goal of the thesis-project: Will a continual, 30-day practice of lectio divina assist in moving a Christian from a more fear-oriented life to a more shalom-oriented life? From the evidence, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the lectio divina project produced positive results for the participants leading to a more shalom-oriented life. The lectio divina workbooks demonstrated that this practice helped the participants make a 15-minute space in their day for 30 consecutive days. The findings revealed that creating

silence to be present to God and hear God's voice through the daily scripture passage provided shalom to the participants. Moreover, this study revealed that quantitatively the lectio divina practice lowered fear scores in all 25 Ward Church participants on an average of 19%, and for those with a marked fear orientation (>22) the practice lowered fear scores 41% on average.

This is a welcomed discovery in a society where fear-related illnesses continue to rise. What is found from this study is that this same fear orientation in our culture affects Christians in evangelical churches. The reality is that fear continues to be a strong motivator and driver for many followers of Christ. As assessed in Chapter Two, this fear orientation is not new. Passages of Scripture show that the fear-oriented life is an ancient problem. It is this author's firm conviction that through the practice of lectio divina there can be transformation in the lives of Christians today.

This study revealed for future ministry that practices that promote silence, stillness, and solitude are desperately needed in the life of the church. The Christian life can become a continual list of tasks that need to be accomplished. In this kind of spirituality, the Christian will only further the belief in themselves that, "You are what you do." The practice of lectio divina helps a Christian rediscover their true identity as a child of God. It is apparent from multiple comments in the lectio divina workbooks that the participants rediscovered their real identity through the process. In a culture that tells a Christian your value is in what you accomplish, this practice brought peace and rest to the participants and reinforced they were loved for who they were not what they did.

## **Future Studies**

While this study was proven useful and effective, it is not without its limitations and opportunities for improvement. There are many opportunities for further studies. One theme that was repeated in multiple workbooks was a desire to continue with the lectio divina practice after August 30, 2017. The participants saw the value that this practice brought to their lives. Unfortunately, for the participants there was not a next step developed for them to continue in the lectio divina practice. It would be valuable to develop a longer project that expands an entire 12 months to assess a longer range study of the effects of lectio divina and the movement towards the shalom-oriented life. Thirty days was a great first step in assessing the validity of lectio divina to cultivate a more shalom-oriented life. Now that the thesis-project has been proven, it is important to expand the positive effects out over a much longer period. The participants who took part in the original project would be a great place to start in finding volunteers to take part in a 12-month lectio divina project. These 25 participants who took part in the thesis-project from beginning to end have already seen the positive effects of the project and have expressed interest in continuing in lectio divina.

In terms of improving the lectio divina project, there was some positive and negative feedback received through the workbooks that could help develop a better lectio divina workbook in the future. One positive that was cited in the workbooks was that the two-minute mandatory silence to begin each day of the practice was extremely helpful for the participants to focus and be present to God. In future reiterations of the lectio divina workbook, it would be important to keep the silence as a mandatory piece of the practice and possibly increase the silence to three or four minutes. The 15 minutes for the daily

lectio divina practice appeared to be an appropriate amount of time. This was a question going into the project: Is 15 minutes too long or too short? The evidence from the workbooks was that this was an appropriate amount of time that did not deter the majority of participants from completing the entire project. It was also long enough to see positive results by the end of the project.

Another positive feedback from the lectio divina workbooks was the continual habit of the daily lectio divina exercise. Some participants expressed that the practice was a good discipline for them to make time each day for the lectio divina project. Some participants said over the course of the month, they grew to love the process and look forward to the reading for that day. This feedback supports the findings expressed in Chapter Three in the fields of neuroscience and the power of the habits that we form. It is important to keep up with a daily exercise as opposed to have multiple days off. The participants found the consistency helpful for positive spiritual formation.

One of the main negative feedbacks through the lectio divina workbooks was that the longer passages in the workbook were difficult to connect with at times. In developing a new lectio divina workbook, it would be important to keep the Scripture passages shorter. When looking back at the workbook, this appears to be an accurate assessment for participants just beginning to use lectio divina. The longer passages are harder. This was a fair critique found in a couple of workbooks that can provide improvements for future studies.

As already mentioned, another possible option for future studies is to incorporate a group lectio divina exercise as part of the project. One of the benefits to the project was that the participants did it independently. This gave the participants a lot of flexibility

with when they wanted to complete the lectio divina exercise for the day. However, participating independently meant there was no accountability to continue and finish. There was a weekly email sent to the participants encouraging them to continue and press forward but there was not the accountability of a group lectio divina exercise. Incorporating some form of group lectio divina into the process could help improve the number of participants who stick with the project throughout the 30-day journey. This is something to consider since six participants chose not to complete the lectio divina project. If there had been a group lectio divina component, would that have helped these participants stay accountable to the project? This is a question that could be answered in a future study.

Another possible study is lectio divina with married couples. Some of the thesis-project participants shared through their lectio divina workbooks that they would enjoy doing lectio divina with their spouse in the future. These married couples who took part in the lectio divina project were asked to complete the project independently. This was by design to test individuals on fear orientation and how an individual 30-day lectio divina practice can move a Christian toward a more shalom orientation. However, a possible future project could be looking at the benefits of married couples working through lectio divina together and tracking their marital happiness. It would be great to see how lectio divina enhances relationships, particularly marriages, in the future. A project like that would have great warrant for a future Doctor of Ministry thesis-project that could speak to a massive issue we are facing in American culture and sadly in the evangelical church: a shocking percentage of Christians who have been divorced. I believe there is warrant

from the findings of this project to support the transformative power of lectio divina in the flourishing of Christian marriages.

### **Implications for Ministry**

The results of the thesis-project reveal that ministry cannot bring long-term change to individuals if it does not consider the importance of practices like lectio divina and what the implications mean for ministry. These revelations confirmed for me the importance of lectio divina in cultivating the shalom-oriented life for staff, congregation members, and myself. The findings from this study have impacted how important lectio divina is for my leadership and how to minister effectively to others.

Over the last four months since the completion of the lectio divina project, it is apparent how my leadership and pastoring have been affected by this thesis-project and how my commitment to the shalom-oriented life has greater resolve because of this project and the results of the participants from Ward Church. Lectio divina has permeated many interactions with staff, congregation members, and various events. I will not be able to communicate all instances of how lectio divina has been infused into my ministry practices but below I want to illustrate in a few instances how this thesis-project has shaped my thinking on the importance of the shalom-oriented life and how lectio divina can play such a vital role in shaping the people God has called me to lead and minister to.

The results from this project revealed the power of spiritual practices, particularly lectio divina, for fostering the shalom-oriented life. Over the last few months, I have seen how these conclusions have impacted my leadership with our staff. Because of my role as the Executive Pastor, my primary pastoral role involves care of our 60+ staff members.

Our weekly staff huddle is where all of our staff gathers to hear what is going on for the various departments of the church and it is a great and quick way to keep one another in the loop for upcoming events. These staff huddles sometimes start with a devotional time with our Senior Pastor or with me. Because of the impact of the lectio divina process, I have started to use this time to take our staff through a group lectio divina and it has been amazing to hear the ways God meets our staff during that time. I took the staff through a lectio divina and we used Isaiah 43:1-3.

But now, this is what the Lord says — he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

It was amazing see how God met our staff in unique ways during this lectio divina time together. One staff member shared that they had been going through a difficult season with a loved one and feeling frustrated for how to help. They were reminded that though the situation feels overwhelming at times, God spoke to them through this passage – that no matter what they face they can overcome the situation.

Another staff member during this same time looking at this same passage shared about how God spoke to them. This staff member shared about a difficult relationship with someone in their life and this difficult person died recently without the chance to repair the relationship. The staff member shared the pain they had carried for many years and through this time of group lectio divina they heard God tell them that they would not be alone. It was amazing to see the impact that came from this one lectio divina experience for multiple staff members.

There was another instance where I led a group lectio divina experience with the entire staff again. This time I heard other staff share of how God met them through Psalm 46:10. “[God] says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.’”

After the staff finished sitting in silence and listening to this passage, they began to share how God spoke to them. One staff member began to cry as they shared about their child who had recently battled depression and was struggling to work through the mental illness. This passage spoke to them that God was in control and as hard as it was to see their child going through such pain, they knew that God would be their refuge. Another staff member shared that God spoke to them about their workload during the new ministry year (September 2017 was a very busy ministry season at Ward Church) and that God was in control of the circumstances. They confessed that they had taken on too much pressure from their work and that this passage had brought them so much peace. These are just some examples of how lectio divina has been incorporated into our staff meeting time weekly when I lead our staff meetings.

Another way lectio divina has become part of the rhythm of my leadership with staff is what I would define as more organic leadership. As the lectio divina practice begins to take root more and more in me, I have found that I am more present to myself and to my staff in ways that I was not previously. There is a “spiritual alertness” that comes through the practice. One instance involved a staff member who had come into my office to discuss an upcoming project. They were looking for multiple things from me during this meeting: direction, funding, and endorsement. I could tell that as they were leaving they were overwhelmed by something. You could feel that they were carrying a

heavy burden. It took me maybe 15 minutes after they had left my office but I went to see them and sat with them. I explained that I thought they were carrying a heavy burden and that I sensed they were overwhelmed and that I wanted to take them through a time of lectio divina together. I shared from Matthew 11:28-30, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

By the end of our experience together, the staff member was in a different place. You could visibly see the fear orientation subside and there was more wholeness in their presence. They shared about how they knew they were carrying too much but did not want to make anyone upset. This practice allowed them “sacred space” in the middle of a busy workday to remember that God is with us and his invitation is for us to rest. It was very clear that this staff member had left our time of lectio divina with a more shalom orientation.

Through this thesis-project, I have seen the importance of lectio divina for our staff. My vision is to have a fun and emotionally healthy staff culture. Lectio divina has played an integral part in helping reach this vision. I know there is more to be done but I know now more than ever that in my role as Executive Pastor I have to lead our staff not only in goals of what we accomplish but how we accomplish. Lectio divina has been essential to staff understanding they are human beings and not “human doings.” My vision is that lectio divina will play a much bigger role moving forward with our staff.

In many ways as Executive Pastor, my “congregation” is the staff. With 60+ staff members, most of my vision (along with the Senior Pastor) is carried out through our

staff to the congregation. But I also carry out several ministry responsibilities including instances where emergency pastoral support is needed. One instance since the completion of the lectio divina project was with a member going through a very difficult time. They shared about how they were dealing with some medical issues and the financial difficulties connected to those issues. It was apparent to me that this person was dealing with much more than just the issues related to this medical situation. There was bitterness and resentment because they thought they were being taken advantage of by the hospital. There was anger with God because they did not understand why God would allow this to happen to them. The conversation was filled with sadness, disappointment, uncertainty, anger, and doubt. I felt led to lead this person through a lectio divina to hear from God for this situation. I read Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

The congregation member was able to release some of the anger and bitterness toward the hospital. Through this thesis-project, I realized the importance of a continual practice of spending time with God. I am not sure the level of support I gave this member for the long term, but could see positive impact in our time together. This experience revealed to me that sporadic spiritual practices have little long-term effect. I could see the short-term effect with this person but question how long the positive effects will last. Lectio divina and its ability to provide positive effects toward shalom orientation are found with continual practice.

Our church hosts a missions conference every three years for our ministry partners around the world. On September 22-24, 2017, our missionaries gathered from all over the world at Ward Church. The goal of this conference was for these partners to connect with others, grow in leadership developmental exercises for ministry, and rest. I was asked to share with our missionaries. I knew going into this week that many were battling difficulties from their ministry. Some were experiencing emotional fatigue, physical disabilities, conflict from their ministry teams, etc.

Because of these issues and the recent completion of the project with Ward participants, I knew that these missionaries needed some help cultivating the shalom-oriented life. I shared with them the importance of abandoning the outcomes of their ministries and trusting God with their work. From the data collected during the project, I knew that lectio divina would serve these missionaries well if we devoted some time to life with God. I opened a section of Scripture that all of them were aware of but I knew we would receive it differently if we created some silence before hearing from God: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself” (Matthew 6:33-34).

I found this time with God was not only moving for the missionaries but for myself as well. Being a pastor, it is easy to succumb to the idea that I have to control the outcomes like my missionary brothers and sisters. Many of the missionaries found me later independently to say thank you not for any words that I said but for simply creating space for them to hear from God again and be reminded of his goodness.

The transformation I experienced through this thesis-project has affected how I respond to speaking requests such as these. I was far less concerned with having to give some incredible talk and more concerned for these ministry partners to experience the shalom-oriented life. I am more aware now that is what they are searching for and that is what they need. My job is to help assist as best I can in that pursuit and then get out of the way.

One last instance of how the lectio divina has impacted my ministry is with our student ministries. I was asked to speak to our high school students in November 2017 about the life of Jesus. I chose to share Matthew 11:28-30 with them about the easy yoke Jesus offers us and life in the kingdom. At the end of the talk, I led the students through a lectio divina from this passage. I asked them to sit in silence and allow God to remind them of his goodness and if they were wearied and burdened God was inviting them once again to rest in him. It is amazing to see how the lectio divina meets each person right where they are regardless of their age.

In reflecting on my thesis-project and the results of the 30-day study, I can see that the value of lectio divina has shaped my ministry and how I interact with staff and the church. The vision of our life is the shalom-oriented life where we experience wholeness with God, others, ourselves, and all creation. The implications of the shalom-oriented life and lectio divina have become a priority. Wholeness in God has become a central theme to my ministry and what I hope for the people I pastor.

## Personal Impact

The thesis-project work has greatly impacted me and the impact the practice of lectio divina can have on a Christian when there is a commitment to the spiritual disciplines. It is a reminder that many Christians have a fear-oriented life and the importance to pastor the congregation to a shalom-oriented life that God longs for his children to experience. It is a reminder that the church desperately needs to reclaim ancient spiritual practices that have been forgotten or set aside. It was amazing to see the overwhelmingly positive response at the end of the 30-day lectio divina project. It is evident that the church is hungry for practices that foster the importance of life with God.

This work serves as a reminder of the importance of personal spiritual practices like lectio divina for my own spiritual life. In the context of ministry, other tasks like preaching, leading, shepherding, managing staff, etc. can cause a disoriented vision. This project has reminded me that the practice of lectio divina is not only needed for the church but is also needed for the pastor who leads the church. As Dallas Willard puts it, “The quality of our souls will indelibly touch others for good or for ill. So we must never forget that the most important thing happening at any moment, in the midst of all our ministerial duties, is the kind of persons we are becoming.”<sup>2</sup> The most important thing a pastor can do is re-orient every area of their life to experience life with God. I understand now more than ever the importance of this vision and for the pastor to cultivate the appropriate spiritual practices, like lectio divina, to experience the shalom-oriented life.

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<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2006), 124.

I see now the importance and the positive effects of lectio divina in my own life and have added it as an essential daily part of my rule of life. I try to make space each day to have one lectio divina passage where I sit in silence and allow God to speak to me through Scripture as I assess where I need to receive God's invitation for that day. It is so easy for me to jump straight into my responsibilities for the day whether it is tasks for work or family. The results of this thesis-project have shown the importance of the shalom-oriented life and how lectio divina can play an essential role in growing in this wholeness. This vision is not only for the church but is equally important for myself.

### **Conclusion**

In the beginning of this project, I began with an initial thought that there is more to life than what I was experiencing and what I believe the people I pastor were experiencing. I knew something was missing in the ways humanity approaches God and his vision for us as his children. What I began to discover was God created humanity from the very beginning to experience wholeness in every possible way. This wholeness was meant to bring a flourishing life. It was the way things were always meant to be. Through working on this project, reading Scripture, and exploring what other authors have written, it became clear that the shalom-oriented life is what every person alive is seeking every moment of the day and this life is available right now in God. I also know from these sources that no one accidentally trips and falls into this life of shalom. It comes with spiritual formation and a commitment to Scripture, Prayer, and Reflection.

Through the work of this thesis-project, the results reveal that a more shalom-oriented life can be found through a continual practice of lectio divina. I am more

convinced than ever that lectio divina is a profound spiritual discipline that God has given to humanity to find shalom in every area of our lives. I can see that this study has given me greater resolve in my life and ministry for cultivating the shalom-oriented life and what that means for walking with others to experience this wholeness in their lives.

## APPENDIX A: THE GENERALIZED ANXIETY TEST

### GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER TEST

**Instructions:** Please read the statements listed below. Answer each item that you believe accurately describes your condition in the past 6 months:

Male:

Female:

Age:

#### 1. I worry about the future

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Almost all day long

#### 2. Any challenge makes me very worried (e.g. I'm very afraid that I will fail when I'm taking exams, qualifying tests, or going through job appraisals)

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

**3. If I'm waiting for someone who is late I fear that something bad has happened to them**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

**4. The extent to which I worry about running out of money disturbs me**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

**5. I worry about possible or current-day health problems conserving me or my family members**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Almost all day long

**6. Minor issues like daily household chores make me sick with worry**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

**7. I try to stop being worried, but I can't help feeling that way**

- Not at all
- Little of the time
- Some of the time
- A great deal of the time
- Most of the time / Always

**8. I feel nervous and restless if I expect that anything may go wrong**

- Harly ever
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

**9. I feel tired**

- Hardly Ever
- Some of the time
- Good part of the time
- Most of the time
- All of the time

**10. If I'm anxious I have difficulties in concentrating**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

**11. I get irritable easily**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

**12. I experience unpleasant body sensations (like muscle tension, stomachache etc.)  
when I feel anxious**

- Not at all
- A little bit
- To some extent
- Usually
- Always

**13. I have digestive disturbances (nausea, or diarrhea)**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very often

**14. My worrying disturbs my sleep (I have difficulty falling or staying asleep or  
restless sleep)**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very often

**15. My worrying affects my day to day life**

- Not at all
- A little bit
- To some extent
- To a significant extent
- In every way

APPENDIX B: LECTIO DIVINA PROJECT WORKBOOK

LECTIO  
DIVINA

1

**Preparation (Silencio)**

*Take a moment to come fully into the present. With your eyes closed, let your body relax, and allow yourself to become consciously aware of God's presence with you. Express your willingness to hear from God in these moments by using a brief prayer such as "Come Lord Jesus" or "Here I am," or "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."*

2

**Read (Lectio)**

*Listen for the word or the phrase that is addressed to you. Turn to the passage and begin to read slowly, pausing between phrases and sentences. You may read silently, or you may find it helpful to read the passage aloud, allowing the words to echo and resonate, sink in and settle into your heart. As you read, listen for a word or phrase that strikes you or catches your attention. Allow a moment of silence, repeating that word or phrase softly to yourself, pondering it and savoring it as though pondering the words of a loved one. This is the word that is meant for you. Be content to listen simply and openly, without judging or analyzing.*

3

**Reflect (Meditatio)**

*How is my life touched by this word? Once you have heard the word that is meant for you, read the passage again, and listen for the way this passage connects with your life. Ask, "What is it in my life right now that needs to hear this word?" Allow several moments of silence following this reading, and explore thoughts, perceptions and sensory impressions. If the passage is a story, perhaps ask yourself, "Where am I in this scene? What do I hear as I imagine myself in the story or hear these words addressed specifically to me? How do the dynamics of this story connect with my own life experience?"*

4

**Respond (Oratio)**

*What is my response to God based on what I have read and encountered? Read the passage one more time, listening for your own deepest and truest response. In silence after the reading, allow your prayer to flow spontaneously from your heart as fully and as truly as you can. At this point you are entering into a personal dialogue with God, "sharing with God the feelings the text has aroused,...feelings such as love, joy, sorrow, anger, repentance, desire, need, conviction, consecration. We pour out our hearts in complete honesty, especially as the text has probed aspects of our being and doing in the midst of various issues and relationships." Pay attention to any sense that God is inviting you to act or to respond in some way to the word you have heard. You may find it helpful to write your prayers, draw or to journal at this point.*

5

**Rest (Contemplatio)**

*Rest in the Word of God. In this final reading you are invited to release and return to a place of rest in God. You have given your response its full expression, so now you can move into a time of waiting and resting in God's presence, like the weaned child who leans against its mother (Psalm 131:2). This is a posture of total yieldedness and abandon to the great Lover of your soul.*

6

**Resolve (Incarnatio)**

*Incarnate (live out) the Word of God. As you emerge from this place of personal encounter with God to life in the company of others, resolve to carry this word with you and to live it out in the context of daily life and activity. As you continue to listen to the word throughout the day, you will be led deeper and deeper into its meaning, until it begins to live in you and you enflesh this word to the world in which you live. As a way of supporting your intent to live out the word you have been given, you may want to choose an image, a picture or a symbol that you can carry to remind you of it.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Taken from Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

SURELY GOD IS MY SALVATION;  
I WILL TRUST AND NOT BE AFRAID.  
THE LORD, THE LORD HIMSELF, IS MY  
STRENGTH AND MY DEFENSE;  
HE HAS BECOME MY SALVATION.”  
WITH JOY YOU WILL DRAW WATER FROM THE  
WELLS OF SALVATION.  
IN THAT DAY YOU WILL SAY: “GIVE PRAISE  
TO THE LORD, PROCLAIM HIS NAME;  
MAKE KNOWN AMONG THE NATIONS  
WHAT HE HAS DONE, AND PROCLAIM THAT  
HIS NAME IS EXALTED.  
SING TO THE LORD, FOR HE HAS DONE  
GLORIOUS THINGS;  
LET THIS BE KNOWN TO ALL THE WORLD.  
SHOUT ALOUD AND SING FOR JOY, PEOPLE  
OF ZION, FOR GREAT IS THE HOLY ONE OF  
ISRAEL AMONG YOU.”

ISAIAH 12: 2-6

*silencio: [2 minutes]*

**read** *lectio:*

*Read and listen for the word or the phrase  
that is addressed to you.*

**reflect** *meditatio:*

*Read again and how is my life touched by this word?*

**respond** *oratio:*

*Read again and what is my response to God based  
on what I have read and encountered?*

**rest** *contemplatio:*

*Read one more time and Rest in the Word of God.*

**resolve** *incarnatio:*

*Incarnate (live out) the Word of God.*

*Total: 15 minutes*

*reflections:*

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**DAY 1**

"COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY  
AND BURDENED, AND I WILL  
GIVE YOU REST.  
TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU  
AND LEARN FROM ME.  
FOR I AM GENTLE AND HUMBLE  
IN HEART, YOU WILL FIND REST  
FOR YOUR SOULS. FOR MY YOKE  
IS EASY AND MY BURDEN  
IS LIGHT."

MATTHEW 11:28-30

*silencio: [2 minutes]*

**read** *lectio:*

*Read and listen for the word or the phrase  
that is addressed to you.*

**reflect** *meditatio:*

*Read again and how is my life touched by this word?*

**respond** *oratio:*

*Read again and what is my response to God based  
on what I have read and encountered?*

**rest** *contemplatio:*

*Read one more time and Rest in the Word of God.*

**resolve** *incarnatio:*

*Incarnate (live out) the Word of God.*

*Total: 15 minutes*

*reflections:*

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**DAY 2**

YOU WILL KEEP IN PERFECT PEACE  
THOSE WHOSE MINDS ARE STEADFAST,  
BECAUSE THEY TRUST IN YOU. TRUST IN  
THE LORD FOREVER, FOR THE LORD,  
THE LORD HIMSELF, IS THE ROCK ETERNAL.

ISAIAH 26:3-4



WHEN I AM AFRAID,  
I PUT MY TRUST IN YOU.  
IN GOD,  
WHOSE WORD I PRAISE—  
IN GOD I TRUST AND AM NOT AFRAID.  
WHAT CAN MERE  
MORTALS DO TO ME?

PSALM 56:3-4



TRULY MY SOUL FINDS REST IN GOD;  
MY SALVATION COMES FROM HIM.

TRULY HE IS MY ROCK  
AND MY SALVATION;  
HE IS MY FORTRESS,  
I WILL NEVER BE  
SHAKEN.

PSALM 62:1-2



I KEEP MY EYES ALWAYS ON THE LORD.  
WITH HIM AT MY RIGHT HAND,  
I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN. THEREFORE MY  
HEART IS GLAD AND MY TONGUE REJOICES;  
MY BODY ALSO WILL REST SECURE, BECAUSE  
YOU WILL NOT ABANDON ME TO THE REALM  
OF THE DEAD,  
NOR WILL YOU LET YOUR FAITHFUL ONE SEE  
DECAY.  
YOU MAKE KNOWN TO ME THE PATH OF LIFE;  
YOU WILL FILL ME WITH JOY IN YOUR  
PRESENCE, WITH ETERNAL PLEASURES AT  
YOUR RIGHT HAND.

PSALM 16:8-11



I LIFT UP MY EYES TO THE MOUNTAINS—  
WHERE DOES MY HELP COME FROM?  
MY HELP COMES FROM THE LORD,  
THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.  
HE WILL NOT LET YOUR FOOT SLIP—  
HE WHO WATCHES OVER YOU  
WILL NOT SLUMBER;  
INDEED, HE WHO WATCHES OVER ISRAEL  
WILL NEITHER SLUMBER NOR SLEEP.  
THE LORD WATCHES OVER YOU—  
THE LORD IS YOUR SHADE AT YOUR RIGHT  
HAND;  
THE SUN WILL NOT HARM YOU BY DAY,  
NOR THE MOON BY NIGHT.  
THE LORD WILL KEEP YOU  
FROM ALL HARM—  
HE WILL WATCH OVER YOUR LIFE;  
THE LORD WILL WATCH OVER YOUR COMING  
AND GOING BOTH NOW AND  
FOREVERMORE.

PSALM 121:1-8

*silencio: [2 minutes]*

**read** *lectio:*

*Read and listen for the word or the phrase  
that is addressed to you.*

**reflect** *meditatio:*

*Read again and how is my life touched by this word?*

**respond** *oratio:*

*Read again and what is my response to God based  
on what I have read and encountered?*

**rest** *contemplatio:*

*Read one more time and Rest in the Word of God.*

**resolve** *incarnatio:*

*Incarnate (live out) the Word of God.*

*Total: 15 minutes*

*reflections:*

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**DAY 7**

“COME, ALL YOU WHO ARE THIRSTY,  
COME TO THE WATERS AND YOU  
WHO HAVE NO MONEY,  
COME, BUY AND EAT!  
COME, BUY WINE AND MILK WITHOUT  
MONEY AND WITHOUT COST.  
WHY SPEND MONEY ON WHAT IS NOT BREAD,  
AND YOUR LABOR ON WHAT  
DOES NOT SATISFY?  
LISTEN, LISTEN TO ME, AND EAT WHAT  
IS GOOD, AND YOU WILL DELIGHT IN THE  
RICHEST OF FARE.  
GIVE EAR AND COME TO ME;  
LISTEN, THAT YOU MAY LIVE.  
I WILL MAKE AN EVERLASTING  
COVENANT WITH YOU, MY FAITHFUL  
LOVE PROMISED TO DAVID.”

ISAIAH 55:1-3



TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR  
HEART AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN  
UNDERSTANDING;  
IN ALL YOUR WAYS SUBMIT TO HIM,  
AND HE WILL MAKE YOUR  
PATHS STRAIGHT.

PROVERBS 3:5-6



MY HEART IS NOT PROUD,  
LORD, MY EYES ARE NOT HAUGHTY;  
I DO NOT CONCERN MYSELF  
WITH GREAT MATTERS OR THINGS  
TOO WONDERFUL FOR ME.  
BUT I HAVE CALMED AND QUIETED MYSELF,  
I AM LIKE A WEANED CHILD  
WITH ITS MOTHER;  
LIKE A WEANED CHILD I AM CONTENT.  
ISRAEL, PUT YOUR HOPE IN  
THE LORD BOTH NOW  
AND FOREVERMORE.

PSALM 131:1-3



"I AM THE TRUE VINE, AND MY FATHER IS  
THE GARDENER.

HE CUTS OFF EVERY BRANCH  
IN ME THAT BEARS NO FRUIT,  
WHILE EVERY BRANCH THAT DOES  
BEAR FRUIT HE PRUNES SO THAT IT  
WILL BE EVEN MORE FRUITFUL.

YOU ARE ALREADY CLEAN BECAUSE OF THE  
WORD I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU.

REMAIN IN ME, AS I ALSO REMAIN IN  
YOU. NO BRANCH CAN BEAR FRUIT BY  
ITSELF; IT MUST REMAIN  
IN THE VINE.

NEITHER CAN YOU BEAR FRUIT  
UNLESS YOU REMAIN IN ME.

"I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE THE BRANCHES.  
IF YOU REMAIN IN ME AND I IN YOU,  
YOU WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT;  
APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING."

JOHN 15:1-5



SING, DAUGHTER ZION;  
SHOUT ALOUD, ISRAEL!

BE GLAD AND REJOICE WITH ALL  
YOUR HEART, DAUGHTER JERUSALEM!  
THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY YOUR  
PUNISHMENT, HE HAS TURNED  
BACK YOUR ENEMY.

THE LORD, THE KING OF ISRAEL,  
IS WITH YOU; NEVER AGAIN WILL YOU  
FEAR ANY HARM.

ON THAT DAY THEY WILL SAY TO  
JERUSALEM, "DO NOT FEAR, ZION; DO NOT  
LET YOUR HANDS HANG LIMP.  
THE LORD YOUR GOD IS WITH YOU, THE  
MIGHTY WARRIOR WHO SAVES.  
HE WILL TAKE GREAT DELIGHT IN YOU; IN  
HIS LOVE HE WILL NO LONGER  
REBUKE YOU, BUT WILL REJOICE  
OVER YOU WITH SINGING."

ZEPHANIAH 3:14-17



IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD,  
AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD,  
AND THE WORD WAS GOD.  
HE WAS WITH GOD IN THE BEGINNING.  
THROUGH HIM ALL THINGS WERE MADE;  
WITHOUT HIM NOTHING WAS  
MADE THAT HAS BEEN MADE.  
IN HIM WAS LIFE, AND THAT LIFE  
WAS THE LIGHT OF ALL MANKIND.  
THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE  
DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS  
HAS NOT OVERCOME IT.

JOHN 1:1-5

*silencio: [2 minutes]*

**read lectio:**

Read and listen for the word or the phrase that is addressed to you.

**reflect** *meditatio*:

*Read again and how is my life touched by this word?*

**respond oratio:**

*Read again and what is my response to God based on what I have read and encountered?*

**rest contemplatio:**

*Read one more time and Rest in the Word of God.*

**resolve** *incarnatio*:

*Incarnate (live out) the Word of God.*

**Total: 15 minutes**

*reflections:*

Blank lined area for notes.

# DAY 13

DO YOU NOT KNOW?  
HAVE YOU NOT HEARD?  
THE LORD IS THE EVERLASTING GOD,  
THE CREATOR OF THE ENDS  
OF THE EARTH.  
HE WILL NOT GROW TIRED OR WEARY,  
AND HIS UNDERSTANDING NO ONE CAN  
FATHOM. HE GIVES STRENGTH  
TO THE WEARY AND INCREASES THE POWER  
OF THE WEAK.  
EVEN YOUTHS GROW TIRED  
AND WEARY, AND YOUNG MEN  
STUMBLE AND FALL; BUT THOSE WHO  
HOPE IN THE LORD WILL  
RENEW THEIR STRENGTH.  
THEY WILL SOAR ON WINGS LIKE  
EAGLES; THEY WILL RUN AND  
NOT GROW WEARY, THEY WILL WALK AND  
NOT BE FAINT.

ISAIAH 40:28-31

*silencio: [2 minutes]*

read *lectio*:

Read and listen for the word or the phrase that is addressed to you.

**reflect** *meditatio*:

*Read again and how is my life touched by this word?*

**respond oratio:**

*Read again and what is my response to God based on what I have read and encountered?*

**rest contemplatio:**

*Read one more time and Rest in the Word of God.*

resolve *incarnatio*:

*Incarnate (live out) the Word of God.*

*Total: 15 minutes*

*reflections:*

[illegible]

## DAY 14

LET US, THEREFORE, MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENTER THAT REST, SO THAT NO ONE WILL PERISH BY FOLLOWING THEIR EXAMPLE OF DISOBEDIENCE. FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS ALIVE AND ACTIVE. SHARPER THAN ANY DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD, IT PENETRATES EVEN TO DIVIDING SOUL AND SPIRIT, JOINTS AND MARROW; IT JUDGES THE THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES OF THE HEART. NOTHING IN ALL CREATION IS HIDDEN FROM GOD'S SIGHT. EVERYTHING IS UNCOVERED AND LAID BARE BEFORE THE EYES OF HIM TO WHOM WE MUST GIVE ACCOUNT.

THEREFORE, SINCE WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST WHO HAS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, JESUS THE SON OF GOD, LET US HOLD FIRMLY TO THE FAITH WE PROFESS. FOR WE DO NOT HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO IS UNABLE TO EMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES, BUT WE HAVE ONE WHO HAS BEEN TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY, JUST AS WE ARE—YET HE DID NOT SIN. LET US THEN APPROACH GOD'S THRONE OF GRACE WITH CONFIDENCE, SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP US IN OUR TIME OF NEED.

HEBREWS 4:11-16



PRAISE BE TO THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR  
LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO HAS BLESSED US IN  
THE HEAVENLY REALMS WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL  
BLESSING IN CHRIST. FOR HE CHOSE US IN HIM  
BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD TO BE  
HOLY AND BLAMELESS IN HIS SIGHT. IN LOVE HE  
PREDESTINED US FOR ADOPTION TO SONSHIP  
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST,  
IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS PLEASURE AND WILL—TO  
THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE,  
WHICH HE HAS FREELY GIVEN US IN THE ONE HE  
LOVES. IN HIM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH  
HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, IN  
ACCORDANCE WITH THE RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE  
THAT HE LAVISHED ON US.

WITH ALL WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING, HE  
MADE KNOWN TO US THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL  
ACCORDING TO HIS GOOD PLEASURE, WHICH HE  
PURPOSED IN CHRIST, TO BE PUT INTO EFFECT  
WHEN THE TIMES REACH THEIR FULFILLMENT—  
TO BRING UNITY TO ALL THINGS IN  
HEAVEN AND ON EARTH UNDER CHRIST.

EPHESIANS 1:3-12

read *lectio*:

**reflect** *meditatio*:

**respond oratio:**

**rest contemplatio:**

**resolve** *incarnatio*:

*Total: 15 minutes*

[illegible]

# DAY 16

SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE TAKES YOU CAPTIVE THROUGH  
HOLLOW AND DECEPTIVE PHILOSOPHY, WHICH  
DEPENDS ON HUMAN TRADITION AND THE ELEMENTAL  
SPIRITUAL FORCES OF THIS WORLD  
RATHER THAN ON CHRIST.

FOR IN CHRIST ALL THE FULLNESS OF THE  
DEITY LIVES IN BODILY FORM, AND IN CHRIST YOU  
HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO FULLNESS.

HE IS THE HEAD OVER EVERY POWER  
AND AUTHORITY. IN HIM YOU WERE ALSO  
CIRCUMCISED WITH A CIRCUMCISION  
NOT PERFORMED BY HUMAN HANDS.

YOUR WHOLE SELF RULED BY THE FLESH WAS PUT OFF  
WHEN YOU WERE CIRCUMCISED BY CHRIST, HAVING  
BEEN BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM,  
IN WHICH YOU WERE ALSO RAISED WITH HIM  
THROUGH YOUR FAITH IN THE WORKING OF GOD, WHO  
RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD. WHEN YOU WERE DEAD  
IN YOUR SINS AND IN THE UNCIRCUMCISION OF YOUR  
FLESH, GOD MADE YOU ALIVE WITH CHRIST.

HE FORGAVE US ALL OUR SINS,  
HAVING CANCELED THE CHARGE OF OUR LEGAL  
INDEBTEDNESS, WHICH STOOD AGAINST US AND  
CONDEMNED US; HE HAS TAKEN IT AWAY, NAILING IT  
TO THE CROSS. AND HAVING DISARMED THE POWERS  
AND AUTHORITIES, HE MADE A PUBLIC SPECTACLE OF  
THEM, TRIUMPHING OVER THEM BY THE CROSS.

COLOSSIANS 2:8-15

**read lectio:**

**reflect** *meditatio*:

**respond oratio:**

**rest contemplatio:**

**resolve** *incarnatio*:

**Total: 15 minutes**

**DAY 17**

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## DAY 17

REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS.  
I WILL SAY IT AGAIN: REJOICE! LET YOUR  
GENTLENESS BE EVIDENT TO ALL. THE  
LORD IS NEAR. DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT  
ANYTHING, BUT IN EVERY SITUATION,  
BY PRAYER AND PETITION, WITH  
THANKSGIVING, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS  
TO GOD. AND THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH  
TRANSCENDS ALL UNDERSTANDING, WILL  
GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS IN  
CHRIST JESUS. FINALLY, BROTHERS AND  
SISTERS, WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS  
NOBLE, WHATEVER IS RIGHT, WHATEVER IS  
PURE, WHATEVER IS LOVELY, WHATEVER IS  
ADMIRABLE—IF ANYTHING IS EXCELLENT  
OR PRAISEWORTHY—THINK ABOUT SUCH  
THINGS. WHATEVER YOU HAVE LEARNED OR  
RECEIVED OR HEARD FROM ME, OR SEEN IN  
ME—PUT IT INTO PRACTICE.  
AND THE GOD OF PEACE WILL  
BE WITH YOU.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

*silencio: [2 minutes]*

read *lectio*:

Read and listen for the word or the phrase that is addressed to you.

**reflect** *meditatio*:

*Read again and how is my life touched by this word?*

**respond oratio:**

*Read again and what is my response to God based on what I have read and encountered?*

**rest contemplatio:**

*Read one more time and Rest in the Word of God.*

**resolve** *incarnatio*:

*Incarnate (live out) the Word of God.*

*Total: 15 minutes*

*reflections:*

DAY 10

# DAY 18

THIS IS WHAT GOD THE LORD SAYS—THE  
CREATOR OF THE HEAVENS, WHO STRETCHES  
THEM OUT, WHO SPREADS OUT THE  
EARTH WITH ALL THAT SPRINGS FROM IT,  
WHO GIVES BREATH TO ITS PEOPLE, AND LIFE  
TO THOSE WHO WALK ON IT: "I, THE LORD,  
HAVE CALLED YOU IN RIGHTEOUSNESS; I  
WILL TAKE HOLD OF YOUR HAND. I WILL  
KEEP YOU AND WILL MAKE YOU TO BE A  
COVENANT FOR THE PEOPLE AND A LIGHT FOR  
THE GENTILES, TO OPEN EYES THAT ARE  
BLIND, TO FREE CAPTIVES FROM PRISON AND  
TO RELEASE FROM THE DUNGEON THOSE WHO  
SIT IN DARKNESS. "I AM THE LORD; THAT IS  
MY NAME! I WILL NOT YIELD MY GLORY TO  
ANOTHER OR MY PRAISE TO IDOLS.  
SEE, THE FORMER THINGS HAVE  
TAKEN PLACE, AND NEW THINGS  
I DECLARE BEFORE THEY SPRING  
INTO BEING I ANNOUNCE  
THEM TO YOU."

ISAIAH 42:5-9

*silencio: [2 minutes]*

**read** *lectio:*

*Read and listen for the word or the phrase  
that is addressed to you.*

**reflect** *meditatio:*

*Read again and how is my life touched by this word?*

**respond** *oratio:*

*Read again and what is my response to God based  
on what I have read and encountered?*

**rest** *contemplatio:*

*Read one more time and Rest in the Word of God.*

**resolve** *incarnatio:*

*Incarnate (live out) the Word of God.*

*Total: 15 minutes*

*reflections:*

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**DAY 19**

BUT WHATEVER WERE GAINS TO ME I  
NOW CONSIDER LOSS FOR THE SAKE OF  
CHRIST. WHAT IS MORE,  
I CONSIDER EVERYTHING A LOSS  
BECAUSE OF THE SURPASSING WORTH OF  
KNOWING CHRIST JESUS MY LORD,  
FOR WHOSE SAKE I HAVE LOST ALL THINGS.  
I CONSIDER THEM GARBAGE,  
THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST AND BE FOUND IN  
HIM, NOT HAVING A RIGHTEOUSNESS OF MY  
OWN THAT COMES FROM THE LAW, BUT THAT  
WHICH IS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST—  
THE RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT COMES FROM  
GOD ON THE BASIS OF FAITH. I WANT TO  
KNOW CHRIST—YES, TO KNOW  
THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION AND  
PARTICIPATION IN HIS SUFFERINGS,  
BECOMING LIKE HIM IN HIS DEATH, AND SO,  
SOMEHOW, ATTAINING TO THE  
RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11



HAVE I NOT COMMANDED YOU?  
BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS.  
DO NOT BE AFRAID; DO NOT BE  
DISCOURAGED, FOR THE LORD YOUR  
GOD WILL BE WITH YOU  
WHEREVER YOU GO.”

JOSHUA 1:9



BUT WHEN THE SET TIME HAD  
FULLY COME, GOD SENT HIS SON,  
BORN OF A WOMAN,  
BORN UNDER THE LAW,  
TO REDEEM THOSE UNDER THE LAW,  
THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE ADOPTION  
TO SONSHIP. BECAUSE YOU ARE  
HIS SONS, GOD SENT THE SPIRIT OF  
HIS SON INTO OUR HEARTS,  
THE SPIRIT WHO CALLS OUT,  
"ABBA, FATHER." SO YOU ARE NO LONGER  
A SLAVE, BUT GOD'S CHILD;  
AND SINCE YOU ARE HIS CHILD,  
GOD HAS MADE YOU  
ALSO AN HEIR.

GALATIANS 4:4-7



BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO DOES NOT  
WALK IN STEP WITH THE WICKED  
OR STAND IN THE WAY THAT SINNERS  
TAKE OR SIT IN THE COMPANY OF MOCKERS,  
BUT WHOSE DELIGHT IS IN THE  
LAW OF THE LORD,  
AND WHO MEDITATES ON HIS LAW  
DAY AND NIGHT. THAT PERSON  
IS LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY  
STREAMS OF WATER, WHICH YIELDS ITS  
FRUIT IN SEASON  
AND WHOSE LEAF DOES NOT WITHER—  
WHATEVER THEY DO PROSPERS.

PSALM 1:1-3



GRACE AND PEACE BE YOURS IN  
ABUNDANCE THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE  
OF GOD AND OF JESUS OUR LORD. HIS DIVINE  
POWER HAS GIVEN US EVERYTHING WE NEED FOR  
A GODLY LIFE THROUGH OUR KNOWLEDGE OF  
HIM WHO CALLED US  
BY HIS OWN GLORY AND GOODNESS.  
THROUGH THESE HE HAS GIVEN US HIS VERY GREAT  
AND PRECIOUS PROMISES, SO THAT THROUGH THEM  
YOU MAY PARTICIPATE IN THE DIVINE NATURE,  
HAVING ESCAPED THE CORRUPTION  
IN THE WORLD CAUSED BY EVIL DESIRES.  
FOR THIS VERY REASON, MAKE EVERY EFFORT  
TO ADD TO YOUR FAITH GOODNESS; AND TO  
GOODNESS, KNOWLEDGE; AND TO KNOWLEDGE,  
SELF-CONTROL; AND TO SELF-CONTROL,  
PERSEVERANCE; AND TO PERSEVERANCE,  
GODLINESS; AND TO GODLINESS, MUTUAL  
AFFECTION; AND TO MUTUAL AFFECTION, LOVE.  
FOR IF YOU POSSESS THESE QUALITIES  
IN INCREASING MEASURE, THEY WILL  
KEEP YOU FROM BEING INEFFECTIVE AND  
UNPRODUCTIVE IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE  
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

2 PETER 1:2-8



THE SPIRIT OF THE SOVEREIGN LORD  
IS ON ME, BECAUSE THE LORD HAS  
ANOINTED ME TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO  
THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO BIND  
UP THE BROKENHEARTED,  
TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE CAPTIVES  
AND RELEASE FROM DARKNESS FOR THE  
PRISONERS, TO PROCLAIM THE YEAR  
OF THE LORD'S FAVOR AND THE DAY OF  
VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD,  
TO COMFORT ALL WHO MOURN, AND  
PROVIDE FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE IN ZION—  
TO BESTOW ON THEM A CROWN OF BEAUTY  
INSTEAD OF ASHES, THE OIL OF JOY  
INSTEAD OF MOURNING, AND A GARMENT  
OF PRAISE INSTEAD OF A SPIRIT OF  
DESPAIR. THEY WILL BE CALLED OAKS OF  
RIGHTEOUSNESS, A PLANTING OF THE LORD  
FOR THE DISPLAY OF HIS SPLENDOR.

ISAIAH 61:1-3



"ALL THIS I HAVE SPOKEN WHILE STILL  
WITH YOU. BUT THE ADVOCATE, THE  
HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM THE FATHER WILL  
SEND IN MY NAME, WILL TEACH YOU ALL  
THINGS AND WILL REMIND YOU  
OF EVERYTHING I HAVE SAID TO YOU.  
PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU;  
MY PEACE I GIVE YOU.  
I DO NOT GIVE TO YOU AS THE WORLD GIVES.  
DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS  
BE TROUBLED AND DO NOT  
BE AFRAID."

JOHN 14:25-27



YOU, GOD, ARE MY GOD,  
EARNESTLY I SEEK YOU;  
I THIRST FOR YOU,  
MY WHOLE BEING LONGS FOR YOU,  
IN A DRY AND PARCHED LAND WHERE  
THERE IS NO WATER.  
I HAVE SEEN YOU IN THE SANCTUARY  
AND BEHELD YOUR POWER  
AND YOUR GLORY. BECAUSE YOUR LOVE IS  
BETTER THAN LIFE,  
MY LIPS WILL GLORIFY YOU.  
I WILL PRAISE YOU AS LONG AS I LIVE,  
AND IN YOUR NAME I WILL LIFT UP MY  
HANDS. I WILL BE FULLY SATISFIED AS  
WITH THE RICHEST OF FOODS;  
WITH SINGING LIPS MY MOUTH  
WILL PRAISE YOU.

PSALM 63:1-5



THEREFORE JESUS SAID AGAIN,  
"VERY TRULY I TELL YOU, I AM THE  
GATE FOR THE SHEEP.  
ALL WHO HAVE COME BEFORE ME  
ARE THIEVES AND ROBBERS,  
BUT THE SHEEP HAVE NOT LISTENED TO  
THEM. I AM THE GATE;  
WHOEVER ENTERS THROUGH ME WILL BE  
SAVED. THEY WILL COME IN AND GO OUT,  
AND FIND PASTURE. THE THIEF  
COMES ONLY TO STEAL AND KILL AND  
DESTROY; I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY  
HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL. "I  
AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD.  
THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN  
HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP.

JOHN 10:7-11



"THEREFORE I TELL YOU, DO NOT WORRY ABOUT  
YOUR LIFE, WHAT YOU WILL EAT OR DRINK;  
OR ABOUT YOUR BODY, WHAT YOU WILL WEAR.  
IS NOT LIFE MORE THAN FOOD, AND THE BODY  
MORE THAN CLOTHES? LOOK AT THE BIRDS OF THE  
AIR; THEY DO NOT SOW OR REAP OR STORE AWAY IN  
BARNs, AND YET YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER FEEDS  
THEM. ARE YOU NOT MUCH MORE VALUABLE THAN  
THEY? CAN ANY ONE OF YOU BY WORRYING ADD A  
SINGLE HOUR TO YOUR LIFE? "AND WHY DO YOU  
WORRY ABOUT CLOTHES? SEE HOW THE FLOWERS OF  
THE FIELD GROW. THEY DO NOT LABOR OR SPIN.  
YET I TELL YOU THAT NOT EVEN SOLOMON IN ALL  
HIS SPLENDOR WAS DRESSED LIKE ONE OF THESE.  
IF THAT IS HOW GOD CLOTHES THE GRASS OF THE  
FIELD, WHICH IS HERE TODAY AND TOMORROW  
IS THROWN INTO THE FIRE, WILL HE NOT MUCH  
MORE CLOTHE YOU—YOU OF LITTLE FAITH?  
SO DO NOT WORRY, SAYING, 'WHAT SHALL WE  
EAT?' OR 'WHAT SHALL WE DRINK?' OR 'WHAT  
SHALL WE WEAR?' FOR THE PAGANS RUN AFTER  
ALL THESE THINGS, AND YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER  
KNOWS THAT YOU NEED THEM. BUT SEEK FIRST  
HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL  
THESE THINGS WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU AS WELL.

MATTHEW 6:25-33



WHAT, THEN, SHALL WE SAY IN RESPONSE TO THESE THINGS? IF GOD IS FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US? HE WHO DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON, BUT GAVE HIM UP FOR US ALL—HOW WILL HE NOT ALSO, ALONG WITH HIM, GRACIOUSLY GIVE US ALL THINGS? WHO WILL BRING ANY CHARGE AGAINST THOSE WHOM GOD HAS CHOSEN? IT IS GOD WHO JUSTIFIES. WHO THEN IS THE ONE WHO CONDEMNS? NO ONE. CHRIST JESUS WHO DIED—MORE THAN THAT, WHO WAS RAISED TO LIFE—IS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD AND IS ALSO INTERCEDING FOR US. WHO SHALL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST? SHALL TROUBLE OR HARDSHIP OR PERSECUTION OR FAMINE OR NAKEDNESS OR DANGER OR SWORD? AS IT IS WRITTEN: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE FACE DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." NO, IN ALL THESE THINGS WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US. FOR I AM CONVINCED THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NEITHER ANGELS NOR DEMONS, NEITHER THE PRESENT NOR THE FUTURE, NOR ANY POWERS, NEITHER HEIGHT NOR DEPTH, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.

ROMANS 8:31-39



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